# CONTENTS

Theme: *Theology and Church*

Editorial – Theology and Church *page 3*

Enabling Congregations to become Theological Communities
FRANK REES
*page 4*

The Rise of the Professional Doctor of Ministry Degree in the ATS
DONALD L. TUCKER
*page 13*

Learning from the African Experience: Bediako and Critical Contexualisation
ALAN THOMSON
*page 31*

Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa
JIM HARRIES
*page 49*

Whither Evangelical Theology? The Work of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen as a Case Study of Contemporary Trajectories
AMOS YONG
*page 60*

Toward an Ethic of Shared Responsibility in Galatians 5:13-15
PETER MAGETO
*page 86*

Book Reviews *page 95*

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# Evangelical Review of Theology

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

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# Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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# Editorial: Theology and Church

In contrast with some earlier periods, the church continues to be a focus of evangelical thinking. In this opening issue for the new year we present some articles which address the combination of theology and church, a link which is sometimes difficult to make. Writing out of considerable experience, Frank Rees of Melbourne, Australia, reports on ways to create and encourage local churches to become healthy by developing their theological and biblical maturity. He says, 'We must… see how the very life of every local church itself involves theological tasks—most fundamentally the challenge of living with and responding to God.'

At the professional level Donald Tucker turns our attention to the extremely popular DMin degree, which has so strongly affected seminaries, churches and personal ministry prospects in recent years. He provides a helpful background to this phenomenon which should prove useful in evaluating the potential value of this course and its graduates in various contexts around the world.

We then turn to Africa for two articles which emphasize the importance, once again, of context for theological reflection. Alan Thomson investigates the work of an individual, Kwame Bediako of Ghana, as he seeks to make theology relevant to the church in its culture. Jim Harries of Kenya discusses the very words that are used in Scripture and theology, and how they need to be interpreted sensitively within their culture to avoid impairment of the communication of the gospel and the theological basis of the church.

Amos Yong's extensive survey of the work of prominent Finnish scholar, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, broadens the scope of our thinking even further. Yong interprets him as a 'world theologian' and in so doing, gives us some guidelines for a 'model' of evangelical theology that is 'faithful to the biblical narrative, ecumenical in scope… [and] anticipates the possibility of the Spirit's speaking through any language'.

We conclude this issue with a Bible study on Galatians chapter 5, by Peter Mageto, emphasizing the necessity of realizing our ethical responsibility within the framework of the believing community rather than in isolation. 'For Paul, to be in freedom is to be in service to and for others'. This approach not only calls attention to the importance of the church for the individual, but also has implications for institutions like seminaries which serve it, and the attitude of the church to those its serves in the community. Thus not only theology but also ethics and spirituality are to be integrated within the life of God's people.

**David Parker, Editor**

ERT (2006) 30:1, 4-12

# Enabling Congregations to Become Theological Communities

Frank Rees

**Key-words:** *Adult Christian Education, social responsibility, worship, fellowship, community, priesthood of all believers, discipleship, narrative, contextualization*

## Introduction

At the height of the 'Adult Christian Education' movement which swept through churches around the world a generation ago, Findley Edge proposed the idea that every local church should be a miniature theological seminary.[1] He envisaged a new period of growth in faith as a result of all people being engaged in biblical study and reflection upon many practical implications of their faith, ranging from the nature of the church through to skills in pastoral care and evangelism. Edge saw a great need for the church to become a mature community, conscious of its identity and purpose: 'It is imperative that we become a people who understand who we are, who God is, what God is about in the world and what God is calling us to be about in the world.'[2] Outlining the core curriculum of the local church as theological seminary, Edge identified five areas: Bible, theology, church history, missions and ethics.[3] In fact, however, most local churches do not see themselves as theological seminaries. On the contrary, there is much to suggest that pastors and local church leaders see theology, church history and

1 Findley B. Edge, *The Greening of the Church* (Waco: Word Books, 1971).

2 Edge, *The Greening of the Church*, p. 37.

3 Edge, *The Greening of the Church*, p. 181.

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many aspects of biblical studies as irrelevant to their concerns.[4]

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson challenge the contemporary church with their small book, *Who Needs Theology?* Their answer is that every Christian needs theology in order to live as a disciple of Jesus. But this idea can make sense only when theology itself is seen as directly related to the living witness of Christians, individually and collectively. They begin with a distinctive description of theology, which conveys this purpose and relationship:

> Christian theology is reflecting on and articulating the God-centred life and beliefs that Christians share as followers of Jesus Christ, and it is done in order that God may be glorified in all Christians are and do.[5]

Here, theology is seen as enabling people to discover and articulate the nature of their shared life and beliefs as followers of Jesus. When seen in this way, it is difficult to imagine why any Christians might object to theology!

Edward Farley has written extensively on the history of theological study and has documented the shift of theology from its natural environment, the churches, into the formal contexts of the academy or university, and away from the life of the people into the formal and professional training of pastors or 'ministers'.[6] As a result of these changes, theology is seen as something pastors study prior to or at the beginning of their life in ministry. Here the 'banking' view of knowledge contributes to the perception of theology as a body of information stored up and then used (or ignored) when the person moves on from study to practice, from theory to action.

If theology is to make a constructive and enriching contribution to church life generally, and not just to the training of pastors before their life in ministry, we must move beyond some of the negative perceptions and polarisations to see how the very life of every local church itself involves theological tasks—most fundamentally the challenge of living with and responding to God.

## A constructive possibility: a vision of the church with God

Doing theology can assist the local church to become a community of *biblically formed* and *socially responsive* Christians, continually engaged in *discerning the presence and call of God* to them and, both individually and collectively, *responding in worship and service*. These are the characteristics of a healthy church and these should be the objectives of theological work within local church communities.

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**4** Evidence that theology and biblical studies are considered by some pastors to be 'unhelpful' in ministry is presented by Gilbert Rendle, 'Reclaiming Professional Jurisdiction: The Re-Emergence of the Theological Task of Ministry', *Theology Today* 59.3 (Oct. 2002), pp. 408–420, p. 417.

**5** Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An invitation to the study of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), p. 49.

**6** See particularly Edward Farley, *Theologia: the fragmentation and unity of theological education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

The most crucial ingredient in this vision of a church is the notion of being *biblically formed*. I have carefully avoided the term 'informed' here, preferring the word 'formed'. What is crucial here is the need to avoid an idea of the Bible as offering us information, which we may seek to discover, learn, teach and 'apply'. The contemporary paradigm of knowledge as information implies that the person who possesses the information is in charge, because of their expertise. Instead, I am drawing upon a New Testament idea of God's word indwelling each of us and all of us. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (Colossians 3:16). This verse has two crucial features. First, it sits within Paul's teaching about a spiritual style of living. Clothed with love, with Christ's peace dwelling in our hearts, we are asked to live in compassion and humility. We are also asked to allow, to permit, Christ's word to dwell in us, with all its depth and riches, and it is thus that the Christian community will be able to be thankful, to teach one another in wisdom—all this is a collective life-style, not an individual achievement— and to express this life in thanks and praise. The element of the *passive voice* is crucial here; this word of Christ is not something we control or possess. It is the word of Christ, which is to dwell within us and to do its work within us. A biblically formed community is, then, one which seeks to be indwelt by Christ's word and spirit, its life formed by his will and way.

A second vital feature of this community is that it will be *socially responsive*. As Jesus himself came to the people and 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:38), so too the Christian community is not one which hides in a holy huddle. It is called to be leaven in the society and a light for the world. Christian obedience is not only to be lived within the community of the church but is to be practised within the wider society. To do so, the church must be socially aware and responsive. Again this is not just a matter of having information. Rather it is about being constructively engaged, responding to a social situation (of need, opportunity or protesting wrongs) in light of the word of Christ.

These elements, biblical formation and social responsiveness, presuppose a conviction about God. The life of the church indwelt by the word of Christ and responding to social situations in the light of that word is a life engaged with God. Here we are speaking of a living God who is present and dynamic, a God who is active both within and beyond the church. The living God of the scriptures is a God who does new things and calls on the people to see these possibilities and to respond in hope (Isaiah 43:19, for example). Therefore, to know God requires more than the study of the past, whether it is texts from the past (the Bible) or doctrinal formulations from the past. Those forms of study, rightly understood, call forth knowledge of the living God in the present. In this vision of the church the 'authority' rests with God in the present, not with what God has said in the past only. The reason we attend to God's revelation in the past is in order to discern God's presence and call now. This is where authority lies: in God's call to be responsive, faithful, active and hopeful in the present. In discerning this call, the church is guided by the authority of the scripture and its continuing call in the present, rather than by the tradi-

tions and formulations of the church in the past. This is not to say that past formulations are negated or unhelpful, but rather that a premium is placed upon being responsive to the scripture in the present. This is our authority here and now, because God is present and active, calling us to faith now.

As a consequence, in this vision of the church *the knowledge of God is the privilege and task of all the people*. All the people are invited and enabled by God's Spirit, given and signified in their baptism, to discern the presence and call of God. All the people are to be immersed in the life of God, to live their baptism as a way of being in the world, individually and collectively. As such, all the people are called and enabled to see where God is active in their place, their relationships and their community. All are called to name God, not simply to speak about God but to identify God, to say what God is like and how God is moving, calling, giving and asking, comforting and redeeming people, sharing in their struggles, provoking new ventures, and so on. This is what theology means: to know and name God, to discover who God is with and for us, and to see our lives and our world in that light.

This church and these people will, then, live in tune with the Holy Spirit, whose life in the world is to make Christ known and to evoke the life of a community in which Christ dwells as word of life. A people alive to the Spirit will live, at least partially, in conformity with Christ. His word and way will bear fruit here, as the harvest of the Spirit.

We can bring these tasks of the church into focus by suggesting several questions which can serve as criteria to guide a theologically aware Christian community. The church should continually be asking itself:

- Where is Christ moving in our situation?
- What is God saying to us, now?
- What is the Spirit calling us to take notice of, to respond to, to discover or do, in conformity with Christ?
- What then shall we do—individually, collectively and cooperatively?

## Getting from here to there: what we can do.

It is vital to recognize that only God can evoke these things. They are the gifts and fruits of God the Holy Spirit. But we can *allow* these things or we can resist them.

To begin, we need to recognize that all Christians are theologians, though not all in the same ways. Some know God more intellectually; some more emotionally; some use words; some are not able to articulate their knowing in words but speak eloquently in deeds of service and love. All know God and show forth the truth and wisdom which has been given to them. All are 'theologians'. Some will resist this name; some are more intentional than others about trying to understand their faith, others 'just get on with it'. But all have insights and contributions to make to a community which is biblically formed and socially aware, in its response to the living God.

To unpack this shift from the 'professional' view of theology to the vision of all people as theologians, several other elements are crucial. First is a rediscovery of the priesthood of all Christians as central to the character of the

church. While we regularly affirm this idea, we do not seem very clear about what it really means. The central idea is drawn from the teaching of 1 Peter 2:5–9. It offers a vision of the whole church, collectively, as a priesthood. The entire Christian community is 'a royal priesthood'. This is a collective image and draws upon ideas of the nation of Israel as a priestly kingdom (see particularly Exodus 19:5, 6). The new people, the royal priesthood, are to *act out* their faith, to *show forth* the ways of God. This is a priesthood of overt, social and communal life-style.

The Protestant Reformation introduced a renewed focus on the idea of 'the priesthood of all the faithful'. For Luther, every Christian has an equal part in the priesthood of the church and thus all have a part in the church's crucial activities, preaching and teaching, baptizing and sharing communion, praying and growing in faith.[7] Furthermore, all have a vocation, a calling. All are to offer their lives, no matter what work they do, as parts of the collective priesthood of the church. Not all are called to be pastors in the church, but all are called to lives of ministry as the church. This ministry may be worked out at the office or school, shop or sportsground, as much as the work of a pastor or preacher. In all these vocations, we are to exercise the priesthood of the whole church. This vision of the church sees all the people as being the church wherever they are, not only when we are gathered 'at church'.

I find it helpful then to speak of the life of the church as an ebb and flow between the gathered church and the dispersed church. Neither on its own is 'the real church'. The church is and must be both. The church gathers for worship, for fellowship and support, teaching, fun, fund-raising, collective service and mission activities, and so forth. The dispersed church includes all those other things we have mentioned already: home life; neighbourhood; local, national and international citizenship; recreation; work; commerce; education; leisure, and more. In these activities, we act as individuals and we participate in many other communities and sub-cultures. Here too we are 'the church'. And in both dimensions, gathered and scattered, we are seeking and serving God, knowing God and contributing to the continuing theology of the church.

It is crucial to this vision of the church, then, to say that God is not known only in the gathered life of the church. God is present and may be known in many places and forms, and thus it is the task of the whole church to discern this presence and to name God, to know what God is doing and to ask the critical theological, ethical and churchly question: what therefore is God calling us to be and to do, in response to God's presence and way in our situation?

One consequence of this collective priesthood is that we can see the gathered life of the church as a continuing conversation, in which all the people can be engaged. From their daily lives of activity and spiritual discernment,

**7** Luther expressed this idea in a number of places, but most explicitly in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). See *Luther's Works, Volume 36*, edited by Abdel R. Wentz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), especially pp. 138–141.

the people come to worship and to share the needs and concerns of their lives. But here they also encounter the word of God preached and shared in the common life and story of the church and together, through preaching, prayer and discussion these many stories of God are woven into one conversation and one discovery of God's presence and way in the present time and situation. This conversation is the theological life of the local church.

It is important to recognize that we are not here advocating a church life which ignores the past and abandons the historic wisdom and formulations of the churches in earlier times. To do so would be foolish and would produce a repetition of so many of the mistakes we imagined we could avoid by ignoring that history. What is necessary here is the theological freedom to receive the wisdom of the past without being bound to fixed forms or structures. Indeed, one of the great gifts of the discipline of theology is precisely to preserve that wisdom and to pass it on, ideally in ways which do not seek to bind the church to the past but rather use that wisdom to inspire and guide the church to be free for God in the present. The church's tradition can be seen in terms of fixed formulae and a fossilised faith. When it is, it is rarely a help and if this is what theology sees as central then most people will find no value in it. But if the history of our faith is seen as the story of a living tradition of people like ourselves learning from God and offering their wisdom to us in our own journey, it may be a rich resource of inspiration and guidance.

## The central task: Reading the Bible together

Evangelical Christians seek to be people who read the Bible together, in order to be formed by it as followers of Christ. That is to say, they seek to be people in whom the word of Christ dwells, in whom the Spirit is evoking conformity to Christ and in whose lives, individually and collectively, the way and purposes of God are paramount.

To fulfil this fundamental purpose of knowing and responding to God, it is essential that we re-discover the Bible and its place in the life of the church, not just in individual Christian lives. The Bible does not primarily offer us information, even information about the life and words of Jesus (though of course it does this!). Gaining 'Bible knowledge', in the sense of information is not the central purpose here. Rather, what we are seeking is encounter with God, in a way that shapes and directs our lives, individually and corporately.

Markus Bockmuehl has written of the biblical texts as having 'an implied reader', who is always a disciple.[8] The Bible implies readers who are seeking God and seeking to live in response to God. God has so guided the authors of the Bible that the focus is always upon what is ahead of us: the text is calling us, the readers, forward. James McClendon has articulated a similar

**8** Markus Bockmuehl, 'Reason, wisdom and the implied disciple of scripture', in David Ford and Graham Stanton (eds), *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM Press, 2003), pp. 53–68.

view, in summarizing what he sees as the distinctively 'baptist' style of being the church, which he distinguishes from the 'catholic' and 'protestant' styles.[9] McClendon proposes a hermeneutical principle which encapsulates the baptist stance: 'the present Christian community is the primitive community and the eschatological community'.[10] In this view, a contemporary group of disciples is in effectively the same situation as the first hearers of the gospel. They are equally competent to receive and respond to the biblical call and invitation, allowing themselves to be directed by the text and by the Spirit towards God's promised future.

Discipleship, then, is the critical factor in our reading and this is what must characterise our communities of faith. Becoming theologically aware is really the same thing as becoming communities of disciples who read the Bible together and seek to respond to God's presence and call. Disciples always are learners. We are always in the situation of seeking guidance, wisdom, insight. To seek God through the study of scripture is also to be directed to the world, to our situation: it is to see that God is present not only in the past but is active, inviting, healing, challenging, enabling, in the present. The Bible points us forward to what God is doing in the world and calls us to participate in this way of life, a life with God.

To become a theologically aware community is to engage, centrally, in the kind of biblical reading which not only 'studies' the text but allows the text to speak to us and direct us towards what it promises. This allows the word of the Scriptures to have active authority in our lives and communities. It sets our priorities and direction. To discern this, we will need more than textual study. We need also the guidance of the Spirit and thus the collective sharing and decision of the community. The authority of the Bible is exercised through our reading and studying, praying and discussing together, and through this process coming to a decision. This affirmation of God's word and calling to a community, in their situation and time, is what it really means to speak of the 'authority' of the Bible. Here the word of God is really directing and forming our life together, our life with God.

It is important to recognize that reading the Bible together in this way will give rise to some difficult questions. It is crucial that pastors and leaders have an appropriate sense of the role of theology as a *critical* discipline and are able to ensure that the negative connotations of such 'criticism' are avoided or overcome. What is called for is a constructive exploration of the situation of the community, not in terms of a negative critique. Though there will be a need for prophetic protest in some situations, maybe all situations, the primary focus must be upon the positive invitation of God, the good news which calls us forward. In this sense, reading the Bible together calls for a critique of our situation and

**9** McClendon purposely uses lower-case letters to distinguish his styles of church community from the names of specific denominations.

**10** James W. McClendon, *Systematic Theology, Vol 1, Ethics*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 31.

of our own response to that situation and to the promise and call inherent in the word of God. We must consider what we are called to do and to become and thus what we are called to change, to leave behind or to challenge, in order to go with the way of God.

## Some examples of what might be done to become theologically responsive communities

Here I would like to identify and explain briefly a number of possible activities which, in various situations, might be used to encourage and nurture the kinds of biblical responsiveness described above. In no sense is this an exhaustive list and always these activities need to be adapted to a local situation. Most I have seen to be very helpful in a variety of situations.

*1. Preaching, teaching and small group studies* should all be directed toward the overall purposes we have described. This requires planning, purpose and leadership, to encourage appropriate emphases. Here the central purposes and themes must be:

- Christian life as discipleship;
- Church understood as discerning community;
- Priesthood of all believers affirmed as the collective responsibility;
- The mission of the dispersed church seen as theologically significant.

The crucial factor here is seeing the text as a living word in the present and seeing the present alive with the same reality, the same God who is revealed in the text. As a result, pastors and teachers will encourage all participants to see themselves as engaged in a living theology. Faith and life, theology and practice, thus come together and affirm one another.

*2. Church life as story-telling*: A vital expression of a theologically aware and responsive community is the sharing of stories about God and God's presence. Here are a few possibilities:

- 'Insights' segment in services: very short talks by people, sharing where God is present, what God is like, in their daily lives, at work, home, neighbourhood. History segments which relate the story of this church, this place, these people;
- Church reports written and told as the story of theological response: that is, the story of the church year told as a story of people with God;
- The history of each church written as the story of theological response;
- Similarly, new proposals for mission activities, church programs and other developments in the local community can be presented in terms of the continuing story of the church's engagement with and response to God.

*3.* Specific *activities encouraging spiritual awareness:*

- Workshops responding to God's presence in our daily experience;
- Taking an 'exegetical walk' around the local church's neighbourhood: discovering who is here and what is happening, and relating these activities to theological themes, biblical stories;
- Some introductory classes in biblical imagination: reading the Bible in ways that connect stories with our living experience now: where is God, who is God, what is God like

in this passage? Where is God, who is God, what is God like in our situation now? What guidance does this reflection offer for our living?

*4.* Providing *specific opportunities for theological study, in a wide range of activities and levels:*

- For Deacons, Elders or other leaders: a workshop describing the priesthood of this local church, and exploring how the gathered life can contribute to the dispersed and total priesthood, and how the dispersed life can be expressed in the gathered life;
- Some classes, forums, films, workshops on specific and theological ideas: what does it mean to be a disciple? what is the church? living with questions; living with difference;
- Making available short papers on specific topics, and encouraging people to read them;
- Identify some internet resources, such as transcripts of radio talks, or short papers, appropriate for people to read;
- Establish an on-line forum for discussion and response to studies, sermons, etc.;
- Invite a college teacher to be a scholar in residence for a month—and perhaps do this every year, with a variety of contributions;
- Hold one weekend per year which is a 'teaching' weekend;
- Encourage those interested and capable to engage in tertiary study of the Bible and theology;
- Invite a theological college to conduct a diploma or degree class on site at your church, in an area of interest, such as biblical studies, pastoral care, mission, theology, spirituality, etc. etc.

In addition, many of these same activities may be used in encouraging a deeper social awareness. Here too a wide range of resources, speakers and materials may be judiciously used to stimulate and encourage responsiveness. Not least of all these resources will be the daily experiences, at work and at home, of the people themselves. When they discover that their experiences are welcomed as contributions to the spiritual life and discernment of the church, they will become very positive and pro-active agents in this process. It will no longer be necessary for pastors to 'push' the issues or try to stimulate awareness.

Unlike Findley Edge's proposals, I have not suggested a 'curriculum' as such for the local church and its developing theological awareness. Rather, I see it as the task of the leadership within each local community to discern together those things which will nurture that community's life with and in responsiveness to God and its mission in that context. There are many resources and many supportive guides for those who seek them. What I do not recommend is that pastors and leaders adopt a program or pre-packaged course of studies from any other place and use it without first relating it to their own people and situation. To do that is to avoid the responsibility of leadership and the great excitement of working together as a theological community. It may seem easier, but in effect it impoverishes the church. The challenge, then, is for pastors and leaders to become facilitators of the life of the church as a biblically formed, socially aware and theologically responsive community.

ERT (2006) 30:1, 13-30

# The Rise of the Professional Doctor of Ministry Degree in the Association of Theological Schools

Donald L. Tucker

**KEYWORDS:** *Clergy education, doctorate, Doctor of Ministry, professional degrees, seminaries, theological education*

## A Brief Review of Professional Doctorates

THE question about the appropriateness of the PhD for advanced study focusing on applied skill and learning rather than pure research has existed since the beginnings of the PhD in Germany. British universities long resisted the PhD at least partly because of its limited scope and narrow focus on research at the expense of teaching and other scholarship. By 1900, the PhD in the United States was recognized as the standard degree for academics. It meant 'prolonged, specialized, and abstract training, par excellence'.[1] But what degree should be given to those demonstrating academic and professional competence as practitioners? What about the legitimacy of professional degrees not intended for pure research or teaching?

John L. Chase, from the United States Office of Education, in a summary of doctoral degrees awarded by United States institutions, reports thirty-four different doctoral degrees besides the PhD and EdD conferred in 1961-1962. And in the decade from 1990 to 1999, professional doctorates in at least twenty-five fields were iden-

1 Roger L. Geiger, *To Advance Knowledge: The Growth of American Research Universities, 1900-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 210. For the United Kingdom, see the recent *Professional Doctorates*, UK Council for Graduate Education, 2002.

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tified in the United Kingdom.[2] Chase and others question the proliferation of doctorates and express concern that additional doctoral degrees might dilute the value of the PhD. At its 1964 annual meeting, the Council of Graduate Schools reviewed twenty-four differently titled doctor's degrees in 'professional' fields.[3] Discussions centred around the needs and definitions of the doctorate. A host of questions arise: Can the degree be justified? What are the qualifications? Who should review the degree? Where is the responsibility for the standards? Are professional associations influencing degree requirements? Is there too much specialization? Is the PhD too rigid? What about admissions criteria? How do these fit the interests of the university?

In the ensuing decades, professional doctorates in the United States continued to flourish. In the USA, differences between degrees are often muddled. Some even suggest that the PhD itself has become a professional degree.[4] The Council of Graduate Schools recognizes the place of the professional doctorate, insisting that admissions and completion criteria be clear. But challenges to their appropriateness remain. The distinctions between applied and traditional research are unclear. At their sessions in 1980, the Council again confronted concerns about professional degrees. Robert Amme of the University of Denver observed the clear trend that the differences between PhD and professional doctorates 'have become rather blurred'. Daniel Zaffarano from Iowa State University concurred. He states unequivocally, 'there is no real difference between the professional doctorate and the research doctorate'. F. N. Andrews of Purdue University concluded that, 'it appears that more and more professionals want to be called *doctor* [italics in original]'. Finally, at the same meeting, Paul Albrecht from the Claremont Graduate School summarised with these comments: 'A sharp distinction between academic and professional graduate programs is becoming more and more inappropriate and anachronistic; academic programs flirt with applied components, professional programs emulate academic values and methods.'[5]

In clergy education, one of the more extraordinary developments in North America has been the explosive rise of the professional Doctor of Ministry degree. Debates within the Association of Theological Schools and Seminaries

**2** Tom Bourner, Rachel Bowden and Stuart Laing, 'Professional Doctorates in England', *Studies in Higher Education* 26 (1), pp. 65-83.

**3** Robert A. Alberty, 'The Doctoral Degrees,' Council of Graduate Schools, *Proceedings* 4 (December 1964), p. 105.

**4** Stephen H. Spurr, *Academic Degree Structures: Innovative Approaches. Principles of Reform in Degree Structures in the United States* (New York: The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), pp. 149-150.

**5** Council of Graduate Schools, 'The Professional Doctorate', *Proceedings* 20 (December 1980), pp. 31-46. See also Council of Graduate Schools, Proceedings 22 (December 1982), p. 80.

in the United States and Canada (ATS)[6] concerning the need for a professional doctorate for ministry began as early as 1932 when ATS first adopted statements regarding the nature and requirements for doctoral degrees.[7] The fascinating history of the debates is covered adequately by Marvin J. Taylor, former Associate Director of ATS, and will not be covered here.[8] This review will concentrate on major trends giving initial and continued impetus to this phenomenon.

## Defining the Professional Doctorate

The use of professional doctorates in the United Kingdom is a rather recent phenomenon (the first professional doctorates were given in the late 1980s and early 1990s) although higher doctorates based upon recognition of published works or distinguished contributions to a field of study had been offered since 1882.[9] Recent concerns in Europe regarding the place of the professional doctorate echo sentiments found in the United States.[10] The debate continues. What is the need? How do we balance the demands of the marketplace and the desires of the individual student? What is its purpose? How should we articulate the distinction between the professional doctorate and the traditional PhD? What educational process should be followed to complete the degree? Who should take the degree? What are the factors for assessing competence and validity? What about the perceived value and legitimacy of the finished product?

Stephen Hoddell of the University of the West of England explores the similarities and dissimilarities between 'professional' doctorates and the traditional PhD in the United Kingdom.[11]

**6** Throughout this essay, the abbreviation ATS will represent the Association of Theological Schools in United States and Canada. Prior to 1974, ATS was known as the American Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (AATS). Initially, from 1936-1940, ATS was known as the Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada. See Jesse H. Ziegler, 'Developing Standards for the Professional Doctorate' in *ATS Through Two Decades: Reflections on Theological Education 1960-1980* (Vandalia, Ohio: Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, 1984), pp. 62-63.

**7** Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada, *Bulletin* 8 (July 1932), p. 15.

**8** See Marvin J. Taylor, 'The Doctor of Ministry: History and Typology,' in G. Douglass Lewis, ed., *Papers from the National Symposium on Issues and Models of Doctor of Ministry Programs* (Hartford, Connecticut: Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1980), pp. 1-26.

**9** See *Professional Doctorates*, UK Council for Graduate Education, 2002 and J. McGinnety and R. McDougall, *The Professional Doctorate: An Old Qualification in a New University* (University of East London), p. 16.

**10** For an excellent summary of developments see the recently published work by David Scott, Andrew Brown, Ingrid Lunt and Lucy Thorne, *Professional Doctorates: Integrating Professional and Academic Knowledge* (Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 2004).

**11** 'The Professional Doctorate and the PhD—Converging or Diverging Lines', by Stephen Hoddell; presentation to the annual conference of SRHE, University of Leicester, 21 December 2000.

Hoddell wrestles first with the definition of professional doctorate and identifies three distinctive characteristics. Firstly, the doctorate has the subject within the title of the degree (such as Doctor of Engineering or Doctor of Business Administration). Second, the subject area is professional, rather than academic, in its focus. Third, much of the programme is completed through taking courses rather than through independent research. And although Hodden attempts to outline the differences and similarities between professional doctorates and the traditional PhD in England, the comparative factors have so many exceptions that a definitive distinction cannot be maintained. Another attempt to clarify differences is presented by Rachel Bowden, Tom Bourner and Stuart Laing. They identify twenty differences between professional doctorates and traditional PhDs.[12] They conclude that differences between doctorates are sometimes harder to identify but that professional doctorates in England and Australia are different from PhDs. Others suggest difficulty in identifying any rigid distinctions. But despite these attempts at differentiation, current trends in processes, requirements, and final product tend to overlap.[13]

Peter D. Syverson of the Doctorate Records Project, National Research Council, in a definition of the research doctorate reveals the ambiguity of such a task. For example, in early days, the Doctor of Ministry was considered by some institutions to be a research degree (Catholic University, University of Chicago, Midwestern Baptist, New Orleans Baptist, Southwestern Baptist, Western Conservative Baptist), but by others to be a professional degree (Andrews, Aquinas, Biola, Boston, Drew, Princeton Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist, Texas Christian, Union Seminary in Virginia).

Another degree oriented toward practical ministry, the Doctor of Missiology (DMiss), suffers from the same confusion. Syverson concludes that the Doctor of Missiology is 'of a professional nature' and should not be included in the definition of research doctorate. Ironically, the two largest schools offering the DMiss initially placed them in different categories. In 1993, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois listed the DMiss under the catalog section, 'Academic Doctoral Level Programs', and the Doctor of Ministry under 'Professional Doctoral Level Program'. Fuller Theological Seminary in California offers the DMiss ('the highest level of professional certification in missiology') through the School of World Missions,

12 'Professional Doctorates in England and Australia: Not a World of Difference', *Higher Education Review* 35, no. 1 (2002), pp. 3-23.

13 See UK Council for Graduate Education, 'Quality Standards of Postgraduate Research Degrees', 1996 and R. H. Spark, 'Professional Doctorates: A Discussion Paper', Occasional Paper GS 97/3, Australian National University, The Graduate School, 1997. The PhD in Europe is given based mostly upon research leading to the dissertation with little classroom teaching activity. For concerns about the place of the PhD in preparation for professional work, see Jules B. LaPidus, 'Doctoral Education: Preparing for the Future', Council of Graduate Schools, 1997.

but the Doctor of Ministry ('a professional degree'), through the Continuing and Extended Education division.[14] The U.S. Department of Education includes the Doctor of Ministry in its annual list of earned doctorates (along with PhD, EdD, DMA, and others), but excludes MD, DDS, JD and others as 'professional' degrees.

In 1991, ATS reorganized its categories for doctoral degrees into 'professional doctoral programs' and 'advanced research and academic degree programs'. In current ATS reports, professional doctorates include the Doctor of Ministry (DMin), Doctor of Missiology (DMiss), Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Sacred Music (SMD), Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA), and Doctor of Church Music (DCM). Advanced research and academic doctorates include Doctor of Theology (ThD), Doctor of Sacred Theology (STD), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees.

## A Professional Doctorate for Clergy

As defined by the UK Council of Graduate Studies, 'a professional doctorate is a programme of advanced study and research which, whilst satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the University, and which develops the capability of individuals to work within a professional context'. In a similar vein, the Association of Theological Schools categorizes the Doctor of Ministry under 'Advanced Programs Oriented toward Ministerial Leadership'.

The primary goal of the DMin is the enhancement of professional competence within the ministerial ranks. It requires not only periods of study on the main campus of the institution offering the degree, but active connection with the 'ministerial context as a learning environment'. Specifically, the degree standards emphasize an advanced understanding of the nature and purpose of ministry, enhanced competencies in pastoral analysis and ministerial skills, the integration of these dimensions into the theologically reflective practice of ministry, new knowledge about the practice of ministry, and continued growth in spiritual maturity.

Reflecting the advanced nature of the degree and its focus on professionalism, entrance requirements include not only the Master of Divinity (the first professional degree for clergy) or its equivalency, but at least three years of experience in ministry since earning the first degree. The DMin should focus on advanced understanding, interdisciplinary competence, comprehensiveness, integration, and critical understanding, demonstrating 'pastoral leadership at its most mature and effective level'.[15]

**14** See catalogs of *Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1993-1994*, pp. 120, 137 and *Fuller Theological Seminary 1992*, pp. 57, 103.

**15** See *ATS Accreditation Standards*, specifically Section F: Doctor of Ministry. Available online at <www.ats.edu/accredit/stantoc.htm.>

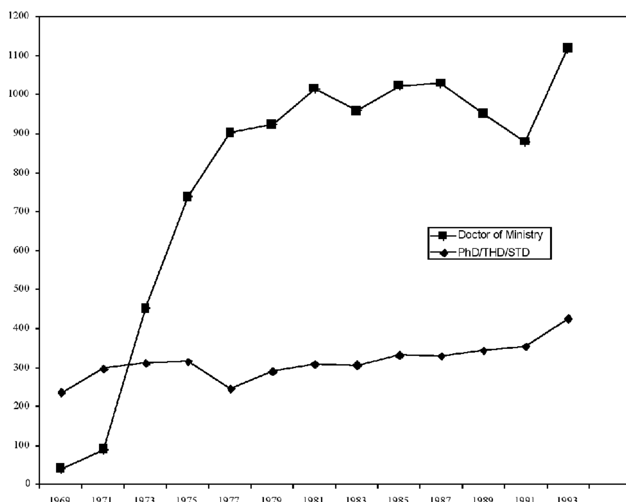


Figure 1. Doctoral Graduates in ATS Schools

## Rise of the Doctor of Ministry in North America

Officially approved by the Association of Theological Schools in 1970 as a degree program for advanced ministerial leadership, the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) is now recognized as the standard terminal professional degree for practising clergy. In the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, between eight hundred and twelve hundred Doctor of Ministry degrees were conferred each year. From 1970 through 1995, more than 20,000 professional doctoral degrees for ministry were granted. See Figure 1 above.

Given the fact that prior to 1990 less than ninety schools were approved to offer the program, this is an astounding number. If all approved seminaries offering the terminal professional ministry degree graduated an equal number of Doctor of Ministry students, the average number at each institution would be more than 220 graduates each year! When examined closely, this calculation is even more remarkable. Nearly forty percent of all Doctor of Ministry students in 1994 were enrolled in only seven theological seminaries (Columbia, Fuller, McCormick, Reformed, San Francisco, Trinity Evangelical, and United). By 1995, headcount enrolment in the Doctor of Ministry at these seven schools ranged from 260 to nearly 750 students. Only fourteen other ATS institutions enrol more than one hundred Doctor of Ministry students each year.

This staggering rise in 'professional' doctoral degrees in comparison with traditional 'research' degrees is evident in the numbers. In 1969, seven schools enrolled 201 students in the Doctor of Ministry (or its precursor,

the related Doctor of Religion) program. At the same time, 1,466 were enrolled in the more traditional PhD (and the related ThD and STD) programs within the seminaries and graduate schools of ATS. Within four years of its approval, the number of Doctor of Ministry students surpassed the total number of traditional doctoral students and by 1977 the ratio of Doctor of Ministry students doubled that of those in traditional research doctorates.

ATS defines terminal 'professional doctoral programs' (those intended for practitioners) as Doctor of Ministry (DMin), Doctor of Missiology (DMiss), Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Scared Music (SMD), Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA), and Doctor of Church Music (DCM). In contrast, 'advanced research and academic degree programs' at the terminal degree level (those intended for researchers and teachers) include Doctor of Theology (ThD), Doctor of Sacred Theology (STD) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). See Figure 2 below.

Officially, the American Association of Theological Schools did not approve the Doctor of Ministry degree until its biennial meeting in 1970. Prior to this, seven schools offered theological doctorates of a professional nature which subsequently became Doctor of Ministry programs. By 1979, enrolment in Doctor of Ministry programs increased exponentially to 5,327 students in 84 different institutions accredited by ATS. At the same time, enrolment in traditional PhD programs offered in ATS schools remained relatively constant. Through the decade of the 1980s enrolment growth in Doctor of Ministry programs was less rapid but still steady. By 1989, enrolment reached

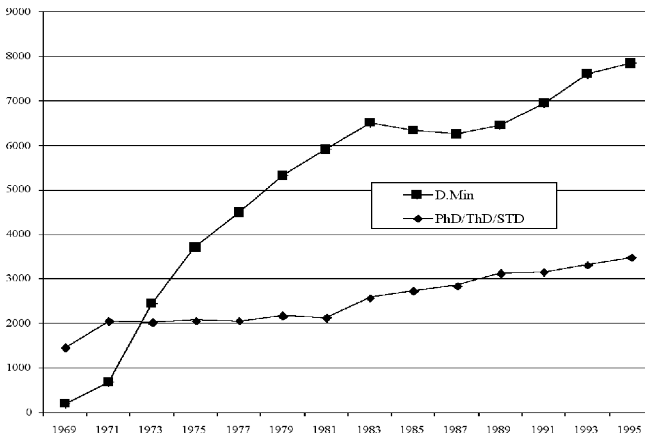


Figure 2. Headcount Enrolment—Doctoral Programs

6,459 in 87 different institutions.[16]

Besides the more than 20,000 Doctor of Ministry graduates of programs established since 1970, nearly 8000 additional students were in process of completion in 1995 within the 100 accredited institutions offering programs.[17] Enrolment in the Doctor of Ministry remained relatively stable supplanting enrolments in other 'professional' (as defined by ATS) degree categories of Doctor of Education, Doctor of Missiology, and Doctor of Musical Arts which report steep enrollment declines. For example, 1990 headcount enrolment in Doctor of Ministry programs was 6,738. Headcount enrolment in 'academic and research' doctorates (PhD, ThD, and STD programs) reached 2,267, but still less than half the enrolment in Doctor of Ministry degree programs.

Enrolment in other 'professional' doctorates (Doctor of Missiology, Doctor of Education and the similar Doctor of Religious Education, and Doctor of Musical Arts or Doctor of Sacred Music) was less than one-tenth of this number. Between 1993 and 1997 Doctor of Ministry programs showed an aggregate increase of 4.7 percent. In this same time period, Doctor of Education enrollments declined by 61.8 percent, Doctor of Missiology enrollment decreased by 44.3 percent, and Doctor of Musical Arts by 45.5 percent. Doctor of Missiology headcount enrollment was 296. Doctor of Education/ Doctor of Religious Education headcount is 326. Doctor of Musical Arts/Doctor of Sacred Music headcount enrollment was 54.[18]

Offered in two different formats, the Doctor of Ministry 'in-sequence' model adds a fourth year to the traditional three-year Master of Divinity degree sequence. The Master of Divinity (the first professional degree for ministry) is typically required prior to obtaining ordination. This in-sequence format, first introduced in the 1960s, provides impetus for the gradual development and formal acceptance of the Doctor of Ministry by ATS. The second option, the 'in-ministry' track, is designed for those already holding the Master of Divinity degree and engaged in full-time ministry. These in-ministry students typically complete additional part-time study toward the advanced degree over a period of two to four years.

In the early stages of the development of the Doctor of Ministry, the in-sequence model was the preferred pattern, particularly by women students. By the mid-1980s, the in-sequence

**16** See yearly editions of the *Fact Book on Theological Education*. See also Marvin J. Taylor (Associate Director of ATS), 'The Doctor of Ministry: History and Typology', in *Papers from the National Symposium on Issues and Models of Doctor of Ministry Programs*, (Hartford, Connecticut March 6-8, 1980), edited by C. Douglass Lewis, pp. 6-7.

**17** See Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), *Bulletin 40* (1992-93), Part 4, Directory, for a list of accredited schools. In 1993, there were a total of 187 accredited schools, 25 associate schools, and 7 candidates for ATS accreditation.

**18** Jonathan Strom and Daniel Aleshire, eds. *Fact Book on Theological Education* (Pittsburgh, PA: The Association of Theological Schools, 1997-98), p. 23.

model declined drastically and the in-ministry model became the standard practice. By 1984, only ten institutions continued to offer the in-sequence degree track with a total enrolment of only 254 students (less than four percent of the total of Doctor of Ministry students in ATS schools). In contrast, eighty-eight institutions offered the in-ministry degree sequence with a total enrolment of 6,467 students. By 1987, the in-ministry model was clearly predominant with less than one percent (only fifty-one students in nine institutions) choosing the in-sequence degree track.[19]

## Factors Influencing the Doctor of Ministry

It seems evident that at least four major forces provide a foundation in this time frame for the establishment and continued development of the Doctor of Ministry degree: (1) demographic shifts, including an influx of women into the seminaries and the rise of evangelicals; (2) the increasing pluralism and secularization of the university and associated divinity schools; (3) clergy status and reputation, particularly public perceptions of the profession; and (4) the ongoing academic debate (within both theological education and the larger field of graduate education) between 'professional' and 'academic' degrees compounded by uncertainty over standards and quality.

### 1. Demographic Shifts

During the twenty-five years between 1927 and 1952, United States church membership increased by nearly sixty percent while the overall general population increased only twenty-eight percent. Much of this growth occurred during the four years following World War II. The church growth trend continued well into the 1950s and 1960s. According to historian, Sydney Ahlstrom, several factors contributed to this growth including the economic upheaval from the crash of 1929, fear of Russia and Communism, an upsurge in civil religion and American patriotism, neo-orthodoxy, and evangelical revivalism. The growth in church membership and church construction along with rapid sales of Bibles and religious books is well documented.[20] Clergy are in demand. To meet the demand for clergy and other church leaders, enrolments in North American graduate theological schools rose rapidly. Seminary enrolment from 1960 to 1990 increased a phenomenal 300 percent, from 18,000 students to nearly 60,000 students.

The growth of evangelical seminaries is especially noteworthy and reaction to 'secularism' drove increasing enrolment in conservative institutions.

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**19** William Baumgartner, ed. *Fact Book on Theological Education* (Vandalia, OH: The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, 1984-85), pp. 5-6.

**20** See Louis Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement 1930-1956* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 127; Fred D. Layman, 'Contemporary Issues in Theological Education,' *The Asbury Theological Journal* 41 (Spring 1986), pp. 106-108 and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Of nineteen seminaries enrolling 100 or more Doctor of Ministry students in 1991 at least twelve of these are commonly identified as evangelical and conservative. The nineteen schools with 100 or more Doctor of Ministry students were Andover Newton, Boston University School of Theology, Columbia Theological Seminary, Drew University, Fuller Theological Seminary, Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, McCormick Theological Seminary, Midwestern Baptist, New York Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, San Francisco Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist, Talbot School of Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, United Theological Seminary (Ohio), and Westminster Theological Seminary. This does not include Dallas Theological Seminary which enrolled 623 PhD students, but only 74 Doctor of Ministry students in 1991. Of special note is the fact that seven schools (Fuller, McCormick, San Francisco, Trinity Evangelical, Reformed Theological, Columbia, and Southern Baptist) enrolled over one-half of all Doctor of Ministry students in 1991.[21]

A second demographic factor affecting seminary growth was the increase in the number of women students. The decade of the 1970s shows considerable theological and sociological debate regarding the ordination and position of women clergy. The extent of the debate is beyond the scope of this report. Statistically, the continued acceptance and ordination of women clergy was clearly evident.

In 1974, women constituted 14.3 percent of total seminary enrolment. By 1979 this rose to 21.1 percent of total seminary enrolment. By 1984 women comprised twenty-five percent of total seminary enrolments but thirty percent of 'in-sequence' Doctor of Ministry students, choosing to remain in seminary for further study rather than enter the ministry immediately after completion of the Master of Divinity. Enrolment of women increased to slightly more than thirty percent of total seminary enrolment by 1991. And by this same year, one-third of overall enrolment in ATS schools were women. More specifically, women students in the seminary doctoral programs alone in 1995 made up more than thirty-three percent of ThD/STD enrolments, roughly thirty percent of PhD enrollment, and approximately thirteen percent of Doctor of Ministry enrolment.[22]

Compared to two decades earlier, women comprised a solid force in seminary enrollment and in seminary doctoral studies. Those who opted for doctoral studies at this juncture seemed more inclined to enter 'academic' degrees intended for teaching and research positions. It is likely that this

**21** Gail King, ed., *Fact Book on Theological Education* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Association of Theological Schools, 1991-92).

**22** *Fact Book*, 1991-1992, Table 2.20A, pp. 34-35. See also Martin E. Marty, 'Trends in Seminary Enrollments', *The Christian Century* 102 (Feb. 6-13, 1985): 116-117. Compare Daniel Aleshire and Jonathan Strom, eds., *Fact Book on Theological Education*, 1995-1996, p. 37 and Table 2.13 and Table 2.14, pp. 40-49.

percentage of women earning the Doctor of Ministry degree will increase as more women are continually ordained and gain prominence in denominational leadership positions. As more women earn the first professional degree (Master of Divinity) and the 'first generation' of women preachers gives way to the next, more terminal professional degrees will probably be awarded.

## 2. Pluralism and Secularization

To the Association of Theological Schools, more significant than the general trends in seminary growth, are the specific shifts of ideological orientation and educational purpose occurring in university religion departments during the 1950s and 1960s. These university departments—traditionally providing the graduate education for teachers of clergy—changed in profound ways. Claude Welch, in a major study, *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal*, suggests a 'crisis of identity' in graduate religious study and a confusion in theological degrees.[23] Welch remarks that seminaries 'in addition to the inevitable concerns about the weakening of their own privileged position, have been fearful (a) that the new university programs would be indifferent to the interest of professional education and of the religious communities and (b) that the movement to by-pass the intermediate professional degree would dilute the quality of graduate religious studies.'[24]

Ideological confusion reigns as the field of religious studies broadens to include history of religions, Eastern cultures, Islamic studies, and other interdisciplinary areas in addition to biblical and theological studies, Western culture and Judeo-Christian heritage. Students enter doctoral programs in religion without the traditional ministerial preparation of the first professional degree (Bachelor of Divinity or Master of Divinity), and even without any religious commitment.[25] Between 1951 and 1960, eleven new graduate programs in religion open. Between 1961 and 1970 twenty-seven additional programs arose. This is more than double the number of programs available before World War II.

Confusion in educational purpose (particularly regarding the validity of distinguishing between practical and research orientation) further mars the picture. The differentiation between the Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Theology is unrecognizable and requirements almost identical at many schools. Further, its intent as a teaching and research degree or for advancement of ministerial skills is ambiguous.

Requirements and expectations for the traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or the Doctor of Theology (ThD) are nearly identical in North American theological seminaries. The Doctor of Hebrew Letters (DHL) at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York) is the equivalent of the PhD or ThD at a

**23** Claude Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1971). Since Welch speaks as the president of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and on behalf of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) his study carries considerable weight.

**24** Welch, *Graduate Education*, pp. 39-40.

**25** Welch, *Graduate Education*, p. 43.

Protestant seminary. Program structures and curriculum expectations are similar. For example, during this time period, the PhD and ThD at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley (California), Harvard University (Massachusetts), Union Theological Seminary (New York), Columbia University (New York), and the PhD and Doctor of Hebrew Letters (DHL) at the Jewish Theological Seminary (New York), according to Welch, were 'academically indistinguishable.'[26] The introduction of the Doctor of Ministry as a 'professional doctorate' muddied the educational water even more.[27]

Given these developments, Welch calls for a significant reduction in doctoral programs in religion and theology. In *Secularization of the Academy*, historian George Marsden—reflecting on the influence of Welch—suggests that 'professors within seminaries and university divinity schools came out looking second rate. Welch… concludes that most seminaries, except for those connected to well-respected universities, were either 'marginal' or 'inadequate'.'[28] Further, 'religion departments increasingly could gain legitimacy by being oriented toward the non-Western, the non-conventional, and the (descriptively) non-Christian'. Arnold S. Nash, from a more theological than sociological angle, traces this secularization by exploring the development of the Latin and Greek linguistic understanding of 'humanity' with a contrasting distinction of 'divinity'.[29] In this environment, little attention is given to legitimate pastoral, denominational, or parish concerns.

William Hull, in a thoughtful response to Welch, analyses carefully the assumptions Welch makes. While agreeing that certain benefits can come from studying religion in a university setting, Hull offers 'three reasons to encourage rather than to discourage doctoral programs in denominational seminaries'.[30] Hull suggests that (1) *empirical realism*—the need to actually practise religion and spirituality; (2) *public leadership*—training leaders competent to deal with 'massive spiritual challenges of our times'; and (3) *creative coexistence*—'May both of our tribes increase!' is a better way than the retrenchment Welch proposes.[31] The real question remains: Are clergy receiving the appropriate and necessary education for their profession? Can a professional doctorate remedy these concerns? The quality and status of the doctorate is suspect. Credibility of the degrees is eroding.

## 3. Clergy Status and Reputation

If the report of Welch did not serve to tarnish clergy reputation and profes-

**26** Welch, *Graduate Education*, pp. 35-37.

**27** ATS, *Bulletin 29* (1970), p. 187.

**28** George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, *Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 214.

**29** Marsden and Longfield, *Secularization*, p. 35. See 'Everything Has A Theological Angle', in Keith R. Bridston and Dwight W. Culver, eds., *The Making of Ministers: Essays on Clergy Training Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1964), pp. 248-263.

**30** William E. Hull, 'Graduate Education in a Denominational Seminary,' *Review and Expositor* 70 (Winter 1973), pp. 49-61.

**31** Hull, 'Graduate Education,' *Review and Expositor*, pp. 59-61.

sional status, it at least reinforced attitudes already prevalent. In 1928, the average salary of the Protestant minister was below that of most factory workers.[32] Minimal education was reflected in minimal pay. Protestant ministers were not highly regarded.

Church historian, E. Brooks Holifield (who also serves as a consultant for the University of Mississippi Center for the Study of Southern Culture and professor of American church history at Candler School of Theology, Emory University), an expert in the history of the American church and pastoral care, contends that, although esteemed as clergy, many local church pastors are looked down upon 'partially because of the churches' low educational standards'.[33] Less than one-third of Protestant clergy in this period graduated from college and seminary compared to two-thirds of Catholic priests who were both college and seminary graduates. '[E]ven the educated and better-paid ministers who drifted to the larger cities found it necessary to contend with a certain patronizing air', according to Holifield.[34] Twenty-five years later, educational standards were somewhat better, but still less than one-half of Protestant ministers had the equivalent of college or seminary graduation.[35]

While steep enrolment increases in the Doctor of Ministry attest to its popularity, concern about its academic credibility remain. For example, in 1989, of the 1,566 applicants to Doctor of Ministry programs, 1,391 were accepted and 1,141 actually enrolled. This means that nearly eighty-nine percent of Doctor of Ministry applicants in 1989 were accepted into programs. This acceptance rate was more than double the aggregate acceptance rate for all other doctoral programs offered in ATS schools. Even the acceptance rate for Master of Arts and Master of Divinity programs was five to ten percent lower than that for the Doctor of Ministry degree. In addition, only one-third of schools offering Doctor of Ministry programs reported a policy for minimum grade point average for entrance and only four schools required submission or consideration of Graduate Record Exam scores.[36]

While credibility is one thing, financial stability and survival is another. On the practical side, it is clear that enrolment in the professional doctorate is one major factor that stems an erosion in overall seminary revenue as the number of applications declined in the traditional Master of Divinity degree, considered the 'bread and butter' of seminary education and the standard degree for ordination in mainline denominations. Master of Divinity enrolments helped salvage a potentially bleak enrolment and financial scenario. Commenting on the effect of

**32** E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), p. 217.

**33** Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, p. 216.

**34** Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, p. 217.

**35** These statistics are compiled by Oren H. Baker, then executive secretary of ATS and professor of pastoral theology at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School. 'Theological Education: Protestant,' in L. E. Blauch, ed., *Education for the Professions* (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1955), p. 238.

**36** Gail Buchwalter King, ed., *Fact Book on Theological Education for the Academic Years 1988-89 and 1989-90* (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools), pp. 23-24.

Doctor of Ministry students in overall seminary enrolment, Marvin Taylor reports that, 'it is readily apparent that the DMin is the major factor in the continued growth in professional enrollments. Without it all but one denominational group of schools would have had a decline in numbers of students.'[37]

A direct correlation between clergy status and reputation and the Doctor of Ministry degree has not been established. Analyses of motivations for entering Doctor of Ministry programs generally emphasize the desire for increased professional competence, desire for a structured relevant program of continuing education, denominational or congregational expectations, or similar sentiments.[38] Occasionally, one will admit the desire to get a better-paying position. Rarely does anyone mention ego and pride. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence linking clergy desire for elevated status and the pursuit of the title 'doctor' is clear.

An editorial appearing in a theological journal in 1948 expresses well the sentiment for titles. Quoting from Ovid R. Sellers of McCormick Seminary, the editorial elaborates:

> It would be a mistake to hold that there is no cause for dissatisfaction about academic recognition in the ministry. If all ministers were called 'Mister,' probably there would be less cause for discontent; but there are the favored ones who have the degree of DD and so are entitled to be addressed as 'Doctor.' All ministers know that this degree means nothing in terms of scholarly achievement, but in the public eye the preacher who is a Doctor rates more veneration than does the parson who is only a Mister. In any group of young ministers, next to the question of vacancy and supply… is the award of the DD.

The writer then suggests that maybe the Doctor of Divinity should be routinely awarded to all ministers after pastoring ten years.[39]

Some even turn to 'degree mills' to purchase their status. In 1960, influential theologian Carl F. H. Henry, in a *Christianity Today* editorial, acknowledges that 'the depth of sin does not exempt the clergy, for whom pride remains a real temptation… The worship of degrees has gone entirely too

**37** Marvin J. Taylor, ed., *Fact Book on Theological Education* (Vandalia, Ohio: Association of Theological Schools, 1974-75), p. 14.

**38** Jackson W. Carroll and others, 'Pastor and Parish as Co-Learners in the Doctor of Ministry Program: An Experiment in Theological Education.' *Theological Education* 16, special issue (Winter 1980), p. 184. This special edition reports on an intensive analysis of the Hartford Seminary 1977 Doctor of Ministry program, including assumptions of motivational issues of clergy involved, and benefits of the program to both the clergy and congregations involved. See also, Jackson W. Carroll, 'Why Is the Doctor of Ministry So Popular?' *The Christian Century* 105 (February 3-10, 1988), pp. 106-107.

**39** J. T. M.[cCosh?], 'Proposal for a Seminary DD Degree,' *Theological Observer*, pp. 790-791, quoting from the *Presbyterian* (April 17, 1948) which reprints an article from *McCormick Speaking* (December 1947).

far.'[40] In 1972, Lee Porter substantiated Henry's claim. 'Ministers are often eager to receive degrees. The number of degree mills that thrive by selling DD degrees is evidence enough.' According to this report, 308 colleges and universities conferred the honorary DD degree, with 'status-driven clergy' one of the most aggressive pursuers of prestige. Only the LHD and LLD. were given out in greater numbers.[41]

Of course, this desire for credibility is not new. Renowned church historian E. Harris Harbison suggests that Martin Luther used his doctorate to gain credibility and 'institutional significance' in his continual conflicts with Anabaptists. Harbison boldly asserts: 'Luther was not the first or the last to gain assurance from the belief that his right to speak out rested not only upon his inner call but also upon his DD [Doctor of Divinity].'[42]

David S. Schuller, in *Ministry in America*, a major study of forty-seven denominations in the 1970s, examines extensively the changing concepts of ministry, including the attitudes and expectations since World War II. He delineates clearly the desire of clergy to be viewed as professionals. 'In contrast with professionals in medicine, law, or academe, many clergy appear unsure and self-deprecating. They suspect that they are less intelligent, that their education is not as good, and that their skills are not so highly developed.'[43] Certainly the prestige and advanced training associated with the title Doctor complements the respect inherent in the position and title of Reverend.

## 4. The 'Professional' versus 'Academic' Debate

Beyond the general growth of seminary enrolment, the severing of denominational ties to secular universities, and the psychological impact of clergy status, there is the on-going debate concerning purpose, content, and validity of the 'professional' doctorate. Is pastoral ministry a profession? Is the education of ministers professional? These are questions asked by ATS in its discussions of the nature and purpose of theological education and continued arguments over degree nomenclature.

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**40** 'The Scandal of Bogus Degrees', *Christianity Today* 4 (May 9, 1960), p. 24. In the same vein is O. W. Frost, 'Pedagogical Quakery', *Christian Century* (July 27, 1960), pp. 880-881. For a more recent acknowledgement of the same problem, see Tim Minnery, 'Short-cut Graduate Degrees Shortchange Everybody', *Christianity Today* 25 (May 29, 1981), pp. 26-29.

**41** Lee Porter, *Degrees for Sale* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1972), p. 143. A recent and thorough study of degree mills, including an overview of the FBI DipScam project, is the work by David W. Stewart and Henry A. Spille, *Diploma Mills: Degrees of Fraud* (New York: American Council on Education and Macmillan Publishing, 1988).

**42** *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 124-125.

**43** Schuller, David S., Merton P. Strommen, and Milo L. Brekke, eds., *Ministry in America: A Report and Analysis, Based on an In-Depth Survey of 47 Denominations in the United States and Canada, with Interpretation by 18 Experts* (The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada and Search Institute). (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), p. 5.

'Theological Education as Professional Education,' the theme of a convocation held at Episcopal Theological School in January 1967, concluded a decade of debate about the kind of continuing education relevant to pastors.[44] Concern was widespread that 'turning everyone into a PhD research scholar' would hinder the ability to relate to the real life of the church.[45] Fifteen years earlier, Seward Hiltner argued before the faculty,

> there is no reason why the PhD should not be awarded for work in depth beginning with one of the functional fields as well as with one of the abstract fields… Or, if the PhD be too sacred to touch, at least there should be some other symbol to encourage exploration from the functional as well as the abstract side.[46]

In 1966, prior to any official endorsement from ATS, the University of Chicago authorizes a Doctor of Ministry for students who feel the need for practical professional education and, at the same time, adds a PhD in Practical Theology.[47] The selection of professional status is now in place. Even earlier, in 1960, San Francisco Theological Seminary establishes an in-service Doctor of Sacred Theology (STD) program for the continuing education of pastors. This course was designed to alternate summer residence study with in-ministry study over a five-year period, followed by a series of comprehensive exams and a dissertation research project; the entire program taking seven years to complete.[48]

In the initial stages of ATS debates over the Doctor of Ministry, many suggest using it as the first degree rather than the last—replacing the Master of Divinity—much like the professional degrees earned in medicine and law (the MD and JD respectively).[49] After a

**44** 'Theological Education as Professional Education', *Theological Education* 5 (Spring 1969), pp. 1-302. This trend toward professional degree nomenclature is also noted by Bruce L. Robinson, in 'Professionalism and Ministry Today', a report given at the thirteenth biennial meeting of the Association for Professional Education for Ministry, held in Atlanta, Georgia, June 13-16, 1974.

**45** Franklin H. Littell, 'Protestant Seminary Education in America', in James Michael Lee and Louis J. Putz, eds., *Seminary Education in a Time of Change* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publisher, 1965), p. 552.

**46** Seward Hiltner, 'The Professional Aspect of Theological Education', unpublished paper prepared for the 1952 annual retreat of the Federated Theology Faculty of the University of Chicago, at Green Lake, Wisconsin, October 1951, [photocopy], pp. 60-61, Alumni Archives, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

**47** *One in Spirit: A Retrospective View of the University of Chicago on the Occasion of its Centennial* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago, 1991), p. 172.

**48** Henry Babcock Adams, 'STD Education at San Francisco', *Theological Education* 1 (Summer 1965), pp. 223-225.

**49** For a general overview, see 'Graduate and Professional Education' in Richard Hofstadter and C. DeWitt Hardy, *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 57-100. See also William J. McGlothlin, *Patterns of Professional Education* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1960); W. Gordon Whaley, 'American Academic Degrees', *Educational Record* 47 (Fall 1966), pp. 525-537; and Edgar H. Schein and Diane W. Kommers, *Professional Education: Some New Directions* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and McGraw-Hill, 1972).

review of more than six hundred organizations, Connolly Gamble, Director of Continuing Education at Union Seminary in Virginia, argues that 'the minister belongs to the learned professions, standing in the company of educators, physicians, and lawyers'.[50] As early as 1949, Ernest C. Colwell, then Dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, had suggested replacing the Bachelor of Divinity with a professional doctorate so that ministerial education would be seen as graduate and professional in nature.[51] In 1963, the School of Theology at Claremont (under the leadership of new President Ernest C. Colwell!) began a four-year Doctor of Religion (RelD) as the basic professional degree for ministry. When ATS, at its 1970 meeting (held in Claremont), voted to adopt the nomenclature Doctor of Ministry, Claremont changed its Doctor of Religion degree to the Doctor of Ministry.[52]

## Educational Quality

Few comprehensive studies of the quality or effectiveness of the DMin exist. The first major study of the effects of the Doctor of Ministry is published by Auburn Theological Seminary and Hartford Seminary's Center for Social and Religious Research in 1987.[53] This study concludes that the advanced professional competence and critical theological reflection originally anticipated for the DMin is less evident than desired. Faculty bemoan that many students did not demonstrate advanced levels of reflection or competence. In addition, Carroll and Wheeler express concern about variations in quality from one program to another.

Since that time, however, ATS revised its standards and expectations for DMin study and clarified program goals. A more recent study conducted in 2002 (although limited in scope to responses of program directors present at one particular conference) suggests the strength of the DMin lies in the level of student theological reflection, a clear improvement over the first decade. However, the same report also suggests that weaknesses still exist in the lack of rigour in research design.[54]

Although some suggest an 'identity crisis' in DMin education[55] the expan-

**50** Connolly C. Gamble, Jr., *The Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister: Report of a Survey* (American Association of Theological Schools, November 1960), p. 5. Gamble's survey included 124 ATS seminaries and 500 other agencies and institutions. See also Charles R. Feilding, *Education for Ministry* (Dayton, Ohio: AATS, 1966) and Owen C. Thomas, 'Professional Education and Theological Education', *Theological Education* 4 (Autumn 1967), pp. 556-565.

**51** Allen J. Moore, 'The Doctor of Ministry a Decade Later', *Theological Education* 4 (Summer 1976), p. 219. Walter D. Wagoner makes this same suggestion in *Bachelor of Divinity* (New York: Association Press, 1963), p. 92.

**52** Allen J. Moore, 'The Doctor of Ministry a Decade Later', *Theological Education* 4 (Summer 1976), p. 222.

**53** Jackson W. Carroll and Barbara G. Wheeler, *A Study of Doctor of Ministry Programs* (Hartford Seminary, 1987).

**54** Timothy D. Lincoln, 'The Quality of Doctor of Ministry Education in 2002: What Program Directors Think'. *Theological Education* 39, 2 (2003), pp. 137-148.

**55** See Charles J. Conniry, Jr., 'Reducing the Identity Crisis in Doctor of Ministry Education', *Theological Education*, 40,1 (2004), pp. 137-152.

sion of programs and enrolments certainly attests to its popularity. The impact of this growth on clergy status, remuneration, and qualifications has not been fully explored. Concerns about quality and perception do not interfere with student enrolment. Even the original report of Carroll and Wheeler confirms the value of the degree in raising clergy confidence and self-esteem and in reaffirming commitment and enthusiasm for ministry.[56] The crisis may be exacerbated by PhD holders who look askance at what is perceived to be inferior. Clarity in degree expectations, a re-evaluation of desired faculty background and qualifications, and improved teaching in research structure may help reduce these concerns.

## What Does the Future Hold?

The place of the professional doctorate, in both the university and the seminary, is clearly established. There will be no retreat. Debates in North America at the inception of the professional Doctor of Ministry, follow similar lines as those for other professional doctorates both in North America and more recently in the United Kingdom. The sheer volume of Doctor of Ministry degrees conferred between 1970 and 1995 certainly attests to its popularity. Its recognition as a legitimate doctorate degree 'to deepen the basic knowledge and skill in ministry' is generally not disputed although its credibility in regard to research and teaching is less certain. The Association of Theological Schools, in its degree standards, makes a distinction between the goals for the Doctor of Ministry (advanced expertise in ministerial practice) and the goals for the Doctor of Philosophy (theological scholarship for teaching, learning, and research). The vast majority of pastors who complete Doctor of Ministry programs report 'raised morale and self-esteem, increased enthusiasm about ordained ministry, and renewed commitment to their current jobs.'[57]

After more than thirty years, the initial euphoria is diminished and current statistics reveal stabilization in Doctor of Ministry enrolment, with modest new real growth. More crucial for long-term credibility are hints from faculty and administrators that the anticipated critical theological insight and significant contributions to research on the practice of ministry have not been realized.[58] Clearer definitions of purpose, rigorous evaluation, and serious attention to quality standards (in accepting new applicants and in examining final candidates for the degree) may well determine the future status for the 'Reverend Doctor'.

**56** Jackson W. Carroll, 'Why Is the D.Min. So Popular?' *Christian Century* 105 (February 3-10, 1988), p. 107.

**57** Jackson W. Carroll, 'Why Is the Doctor of Ministry So Popular?' *The Christian Century* 105 (Februaryv1988), pp. 107-108.

**58** Compare responses by Faith Burgess, William Lesher, J. Randall Nichols and Ray S. Anderson in 'The Doctor of Ministry Program in the Context of Theological Education', *Theological Education* 23 (Spring 1987), pp.77-88.

ERT (2006) 30:1, 31-48

# Learning from the African Experience: Bediako and Critical Contextualisation

Alan Thomson

**Keywords:** *Africa, contextualisation, methodology, contextual models, primal religions, monotheism,* missio Dei

Since the 1970's the term 'contextual theology' has gained in prominence and relevance for those engaged in intercultural, and increasingly intracultural, theologising. Discussions surrounding the topic are generally being engaged on two distinct though intimately interrelated levels. The first is that of the theoretical, what is generally referred to as 'missiology', while the second is that of the practical, what can be called 'mission studies'.

Looking first at the missiological level, discussion tends to focus on understanding what contextual theology is and how it works, or perhaps, more correctly, how it should work. A key driver behind this discussion is the desire for a genuine grappling with the explosion of local theologies coming from the Two-Thirds World. Against the threat of theological relativism and unbounded pluralism, or what could be called the tyranny of the particular, there is a need to search for some understanding of the processes, derivations and implications of these local theologies. By undertaking this search it is hoped that mechanisms useful for mediating against the tyranny of the particular may be found.

So the study of contextual theology proceeds apace, actively engaging across a broad range of theological and practical concerns. In fact, by its nature, the study of contextual theology crosses all of the major disciplines of traditional Christian study. It is, after all, a discussion about frameworks and foundations. However, within this broad range of scholarship there is an understandable emphasis on hermeneutical and methodological issues. This is perhaps why certain issues have come to dominate the missiological agenda, such as the Evangelical and Ecumenical divide on the authority of scripture, and the relative

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merits of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. In discussing missiological issues this paper will not concern itself with hermeneutical concerns per se, though of course they are integral to any discussion of contextual theology; rather it will principally be concerned with methodological issues.

At the mission studies level the concerns are more practical in nature, generally focused on matters of application. The primary focus here is on active engagement in inter and intracultural dialogue and evangelism. The driving questions are usually related to issues of particularity, for example, those of method. So, for instance, the relevant question may be: how can I relate more relevantly to my poor Philippine Muslim neighbours when I am an affluent white missionary? Or, perhaps, how do I, a South Korean missionary, bridge the cultural gap with my African or New Zealand neighbours? In similar vein this paper is concerned with questions such as: how can I actively live out my faith in the context of African traditional religions? These are but a small selection of the great many concerns facing those actively engaged in living out their faith within the various, multifaceted contexts in which Christianity is expressed. They are representative of the other deep concern of this paper, addressing in some small measure the *how* of Christian engagement with the world.

Of course the theoretical and practical distinction drawn above is never so clearly distinguishable in reality. The missiological considerations draw deeply from the well of actual experiences for their empirical data, while the practice of contextual engagement is, we would hope, largely predicated upon theoretical formulations derived from the insights of missiologists. As this implies, there is an important dialogical, in fact symbiotic, relationship between those involved in missiology and those involved in mission studies.

This paper seeks to contribute to this relationship by undertaking a dialectical engagement between the practical and the theoretical. By this means I hope to demonstrate how a fruitful theological discussion can ensue, one that changes in important ways all those involved in it. Before proceeding with this demonstration though it is appropriate to pause for a moment to discuss, in the following order, both the key parameters of the dialectical approach being undertaken here, and the parameters within which the discussion will proceed.

## Key Parameters of Dialectical Approach

As intimated above, the missiological framework is largely driven by a modular approach. In part this represents a human predilection for simplicity: a search for tools that achieve some coherent management of an overly abundant supply of data. In this context models operate as general explanatory frameworks. Models can also serve other purposes; for example, some are constructed for indicative or predictive purposes, providing direction for future research endeavours. While being mindful that in some sense all models have an element of this latter characteristic this essay is concerned primarily with the former, those models that seek to provide a working

understanding of reality.[1]

In using such explanatory models there is a need to acknowledge their reductionist tendencies. These models are, after all, simplistic representations of what are often very complex sets of phenomena. This is certainly true in the field of practical theological inquiry. Here a prolific amount of anthropological, sociological and economic data intersects with the complexities of human behaviour to weave an extraordinarily intricate garment of interactions. It is the unenviable task of theologians occupied with such inquiries to engage their study at both the level of data and narrative, to intimately understand the detail while concurrently constructing a sensible framework with which to explain the available data.

However, mere understanding is insufficient. Once understanding is gained it is incumbent upon theologians to disseminate their findings. This dissemination is not only necessary for explanatory purposes, it also allows for critical reflection by the community at large. Open, though loving, critiquing can lead the way to a very constructive dialogue, one in which important contributions can be made to the models being presented, whether by highlighting overlooked, or over/under stated aspects. Such a dialogue may also become the vehicle for further creativity that extends or supersedes the original models.

This returns us to the aim of this paper, though now with a greater understanding of the parameters involved. It allows us to state more accurately and succinctly the aim of this paper as engaging in a critical dialogue between modular contextual theology theory on the one hand, and the actual practice of intercultural communication on the other, with the hope of constructively contributing towards both. This paper further proposes that this can best be achieved by examining certain key models of contextual theology through a specific case study. This case study approach allows us to gain insight not only into the relative merits of the modular perspective to contextual theology, thereby providing an understanding of the usefulness of these models as tools for advancing our understanding of contextual theologising, but also into how the use of these models can contribute to the improvement of a specific situation.

## Scope

As noted above this paper will proceed on the basis of a case study. This immediately raises the question of where a case study can be sourced. Of course the choice made here immediately betrays the author's regional predilections, which in this case happens to be Africa. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the dialectical methodology along which this analysis proceeds is equally valid for any regional analysis. Having established the general context to be Africa though, there is the important consideration of determining the level of specificity required

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**1** Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study of Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), esp. pp. 23-33, and Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2002), Rev ed., pp. 28-33, guide the following.

to achieve our aim.

For the purposes of comparative discussion it is often easier to speak in generalisations, allowing very diverse and often divergent ideas to coalesce under a single descriptive term. One such term is that of 'African Theology'. Its usefulness relates to its ability to draw together a multitude of similar theological threads from one of the most multi-faceted continents on earth. It does have accompanying difficulties though, not least of which is the widely differing contexts included within its ambit. In speaking of African Theology it is therefore very important to describe the constituent similarities included within it, thereby delineating the limits of similarity being discussed, while concurrently acknowledging the broad diversities still inherent within the discussion.

With respect to the broad similarities, it is proposed that this paper will have particular relevance for those interested in African theology emanating from contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa. This delineation is chosen for a number of reasons, beyond the obvious geographic consideration. Two primary reasons may be cited. First, there is the quite different historical development of Christianity between these regions. The development of Ethiopic Christianity, for instance, is quite different from the primarily western transmission of Christianity experienced by its southern counterparts. Second, there are the many substantive differences between the theological contexts embraced by these regions. So, for example, the South African theological context could be broadly described as embracing or emanating from Black and Liberation theology. While these theologies are certainly present in the region being examined, they are not as pervasively or predominately so.[2]

Having established the broad similarity present across a swathe of Africa there is also the need to acknowledge the very many, and often antagonistic, diversities it represents. Most notably there exists a significant divide between the theologies derived from the nations of West Africa as opposed to those of the East. In fact, at each further stage of particularisation multiple divergences emerge. Hence the nations of West Africa contain within them a plethora of theological streams, and, similarly, individual nations such as Ghana display equally diverse theological thinking and activity.[3]

Trying to locate oneself within this milieu is an unenviable task. The preceding discussion does, however, highlight two methodologies that could usefully allow us to become orientated within the African context. The first is to frame this discussion around the general appellation of African Theology, seeking a pan-African case study of critical contextualisation. In a paper of this scope, however, such an ambi-

**2** Tite Tienou, 'The Church in African Theology; Description and Analysis of Hermeneutical Presuppositions', ed. Carson, D. A., *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 151-165. So also, Hesselgrave, and Rommen, *Contextualization*, pp. 96-98.

**3** John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 15-23. Hesselgrave, and Rommen, *Contextualization*, pp. 96-98 cite several other important factors, such as differing theological sources and aims.

tious project would prove too difficult to tame. However, one other avenue of inquiry may prove fruitful, viz, reference to a particular, specific representative context. This is a potentially useful context because, as noted above, it is in the particular context that the modular framework needs to have validity and usefulness.

This essay will therefore seek to examine contextualisation, as experienced within Africa, through the thoughts of a single African theologian, the Ghanaian, Kwame Bediako. Of course no such discussion can proceed in some kind of glorious isolation, and particularly so within the African context where the sense of community is so strongly present. We shall therefore hear from a number of other theologians, of varying African nationalities and Christian roots, who will become important conversation partners as we progress.

It is perhaps important to justify the choice of Bediako over other equally commendable subjects, especially in light of the large pool of significant theologians Africa has produced. Within such a context there will never be a truly satisfactory justification for the particular choice made. It can be noted though that some important guidelines in this choice included the desire to interact with a theologian of considerable pan-African status, who had a consistent and significant body of written work to draw from and, given the context indicated by the title of this paper, had some significant interaction with western theologians.

Bediako is an evangelical theologian who is an increasingly important bridging figure between Africa and the West. He is both director of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre in Ghana, and a director of the Oxford Center of Mission Studies, Oxford, England; as well as formerly being Visiting Lecturer in African Theology at the Center for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, New College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Though much of his time is spent in Ghana he travels extensively in the West each year lecturing. Aside from his vital bridging role Bediako was chosen for two further reasons. First, we shall see that his theology is fairly representative of the middle ground of African thinking on contextualisation issues; and second, because of his articulate elaboration of both historical and contemporary African theological processes.

Having decided upon the subject of the case study it now remains to proceed with the discussion. This paper will therefore seek to understand how Kwame Bediako views contextualisation; then it will seek to understand his perception relative to appropriate modular frameworks; thirdly, it will comment critically upon both of these frameworks and Bediako's positions in light of the preceding analysis. Finally, it will then draw out some of the broader implications that arise out of the analysis.

## The Task at Hand

The African theologian John Pobee notes:

> The task is to develop an authentically African expression of the one gospel … expressing the one gospel in such a way that not only will Africans see and understand it

but also non-Africans will see themselves as sharing a common heritage with Africans.[4]

For Pobee this is a task that can be achieved by erecting a theological framework around three key guidelines: '… the search must be biblical, apostolic and catholic'.[5] Somewhat in anticipation of later discussion we can note before proceeding further that these key guidelines are not exhaustive of the requirements. Justin Upkong notes the importance of context in the search, specifically highlighting orthopraxy as a central element of African theological dialogue. Nominally 'secular' structures therefore also need to form an important element in the theological construct.[6]

## Kwame Bediako

In Ghana Kwame Bediako is one scholar undertaking the task Pobee outlines. He has engaged in substantial research of both the roots of African theology, through historical investigation, and of the significance of African theology in the contemporary international Christian environment.[7] Methodologically he builds on his historical foundation by elaborating a comprehensive picture of the broad distinctives that mark out a contemporary African theology. The hermeneutical key informing his historical research, and therefore used in his understanding of the current contours of African theology, is the African search for identity. He comments that historically the development of an African theology represents the story of a search for an authentic African Christian identity.[8]

Surveying the history of the gospel story in Africa, Bediako concludes that despite the initial missionary encounters being traumatic events for traditional African cultures, the dynamic interaction of the gospel with African culture was deep and abiding, eventually resulting in a significant, indigenous reassessment of the received

**4** John Pobee, *West Africa: Christ Would be an African Too*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996), p. 49. Tite Tienou 'Indigenous African Christian Theologies: The Uphill Road', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 14/2, (Apr 1990), pp. 73-77. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1985), pp. pp. 77-86.

**5** John Pobee, *West Africa*, 49. Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Enduring Validity of Cross-Cultural Mission', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 12/2 (Apr 1988), pp. 50-53; A. Nkwoka, 'Jesus as Eldest Brother, (Okpara): An Igbo Paradigm for Christology in the African Context', *Asia Journal of Theology*, 5/1 (Apr 1991), 87-103; B. Quarshie, 'The significance of biblical studies for African Christian theology', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 3/1 (Jun 2000), pp. 17-26.

**6** Justin Upkong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach to Inculturation Theology', *Mission Studies*, XVI/2, 32 (1999), pp. 100-124.

**7** See especially Kwame Bediako, 'Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religions', Samuel, Vinay, and Sugden, Chris, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies from the contexts of poverty, powerlessness and religious pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 81-121.

**8** Tite Tienou, 'The Church in African Theology; Description and Analysis of Hermeneutical Presuppositions', Carson, D.A., *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 151-165, esp. p. 152.

gospel message.[9] This is not the only insight he gleaned from this historical analysis. Bediako also recognized an inherent ethnocentric bias as driving much of the modern missionary enterprise. Important European mission conferences are reflective of this premise with, for example, the 1910 Edinburgh Conference concluding that there existed no formative preparation for the gospel message in the animist indigenous cultures of Africa. As Bediako notes, this led to an inevitable conclusion: the need to import the gospel, along with its European cultural accoutrements, as the only means by which Christianity could be both articulated and lived.[10] In effect, Europe was culturally and religiously exported. This, then, is the formative backdrop to the development of Kwame Bediako's theology.

The heart of Bediako's argument is captured in a paper presented in 2001, in which he discusses 'Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition'. In this paper he is deeply concerned with the need for Christians to recognize that scripture is inherently participative in nature and that this is central to understanding Christian identity. Each Christian or Christian group has lived within the confines of a natural culture that at some stage was intersected by the story of the culture embodied in scripture.[11] Over a period of time the two cultures, the natural, and what he terms the adoptive (scriptural) culture, eventually come to merge within the individual or group such that 'Scripture becomes recognized by us as the narrative that explains who we are, and therefore as our narrative'.[12] At this point the adoptive scriptural culture has become 'our story'; we are adopted into it. Quite clearly this analytical commentary reflects a self-conscious stance regarding the place of both culture and scripture within the gospel and culture interaction.

His mode of argument is very instructive in attempting to understand what this stance might be. As previously noted, the historical development of African theology is very important to him. His fundamental thesis is that the post colonial period of the 1950s to the early 1980s saw African theology pursue an unusual direction, at least in western eyes, as it adopted, in Bediako's terms, the 'hermeneutic of identity'.[13] This pur-

**9** Tienou, 'The Church', pp. 82-84. For balance note also Newbigin, 'Enduring Validity', p. 50 and Steven Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity: History and Typology', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XVL/3 (1986), pp. 166-186 and particularly Lamin Sanneh, 'The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* 17/4 (Oct 1983), pp. 165-171.

**10** Bediako, 'Biblical Christologies', pp. 84-94.

**11** John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 92-98.

**12** Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 4/1 (Jun 2001), pp. 2-11.

**13** Bediako, along with most commentators, strongly distinguishes between African theology and Black theology; see for example, 'Understanding African Theology in the 20th Century', *Themelios*, 20/1 (Oct 1994), pp. 14-20.

suit had a very specific focus in the primal roots of African society, an explicit recognition that African society is, and always has been, inherently religious.

Importantly for our purposes, Bediako notes that this search actually constituted a new theological methodology. Though not new in Christian history, it was new in the imaginations of western theologians still wedded to enlightenment sourced, rationalistic theological processes.[14] He notes that in fact it constitutes old methodology with the highest of historical validation, being the primary tool utilized by the early church. Key examples of its use include the Jerusalem Council of Acts and the Pauline approach.[15]

Bediako then goes on to note that African theologians, by the 1980s, had used the results of this search to derive an authentic African theology from an essentially religious foundation. Importantly for Bediako, this showed that African theologians of earlier decades had pursued their search '… not as historians of religion do, nor as anthropologists do, but as Christian theologians…'[16] Their conclusions were therefore not sourced in a western dominated model of theological engagement but in a genuinely biblical encounter with their religious past.

## Hiebert and the Generic Model

The next logical step for Bediako was to examine what African theologians have made of this since the early 1980s. He notes that three primary streams of thinking can be discerned. The first is the radical continuity advocated by indigenisers such as Bolaji Idowu.[17] Bediako, specifically examining Idowu's treatment of God, notes that he perceives an essential, though diffuse, monotheism within the African traditional religions. Idowu therefore rejects the proposition that these religions be viewed as polytheistic. To this extent the relationship between the traditional religions and the Christian God can be likened to a continuum of revelation. This implies that both have an enduring place within the religious framework of African consciousness.

Bediako's greatest praise and sharpest critique of Idowu comes at this very point. He sees Idowu as blazing an important trail in the search for a uniquely African Christian identity. Central to this, in Bediako's view, is the necessity of dealing with the place of the primal religions in ongoing Christian living, also a central theme in Idowu's work. Idowu envisages an essential continuity upon which Bediako is keen to build. The danger Bedi-

**14** Abraham Akrong is eloquent on this, providing personal testimony in answer to a question on how to recover identity and religious and cultural self-expression from the African past. Refer to Barbour, C.M., et al., 'Gospel, Culture, Healing and Reconciliation: A Shalom Conversation', *Mission Studies*, XVI-2/32 (1999), 135-150, pp. pp. 141-143.

**15** For this latter point note Larry Poston, 'Cultural chameleon: Contextualization from a Pauline perspective', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 36/4 (Oct 2000), pp. 460-469.

**16** Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', p. 15, quoting Andrew Walls here.

**17** See Bediako, 'The Roots of African Theology', pp. 61-62 and 'Understanding African Theology', p. 16.

ako attempts to avoid, which he perceives Idowu as having succumbed to, is formulating this proposition in such a way that the newness or unique voice of the gospel is subsumed under the auspices of primal African religions. Bediako is concerned that Idowu has not gone on to explicate the unique impact of the gospel on Africans. To this extent Idowu is an example of Hiebert's uncritical contextualization, an example of a syncretistic acceptance of traditional practices.[18]

The second stream Bediako identifies is the radical discontinuity championed by the likes of Byang Kato. Bediako focuses on Kato's insistence that a distinctive biblical framework needs to lie at the heart of an African theology. Kato, in this sense, rejects the need for engaging in a creative dialogue between traditional culture and theology, preferring instead the primacy of the universal biblical witness. In effect this is a form of Hiebert's 'Rejection of Contextualisation' or 'Denial of the Old'.[19]

The third and final stream of thinking is the middle ground occupied by 'translators' such as John Mbiti, who uphold

> … the development of a sustainable tradition … [in which] … the Christian faith is capable of 'translation' into African terms without injury to its essential content … not in 'indigenizing' Christianity or theology … rather, in letting the Christian gospel encounter, as well as be shaped by, the African experience …[20]

Bediako stands in support of this stream of thinking, noting that it contains the grounds for maintaining the fine balance necessary between the two divergent approaches outlined above. On the one hand it holds in high esteem the cultural and theological legacy of the African primal religions, while on the other it interacts critically with this legacy through the mechanism of a supracultural gospel. In this way Bediako envisages the best of both worlds coming together, building a narrow path of creative tension upon which can be forged the future theological enterprise of African Christianity.[21]

This fits quite nicely into the categorisation Hiebert puts forward as the preferred methodology for contextualizing the gospel message: critical contextualisation.[22] As Hiebert describes it, critical contextualisation is a process whereby a congregation first recognizes the need for a critical

**18** Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1985), pp. 185-186.

**19** Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, pp. 184-185.

**20** Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', pp. 16-17.

**21** There are, of course, those who disagree with much of the foregoing. So, Tienou views Mbiti as advocating an essential continuity per Idowu's uncritical contextualization; 'Indigenous African Christian Theologies', p. 75.

**22** Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, pp. 186-190. Note also Wilbert Shenk's idea of 'critical engagement', present in the second century *Epistle to Diognetus*, 'Missionary Encounter with Culture', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 15/3 (July 1991), pp. 104-109.

engagement of culture by the scriptures; second, uncritically gathers information on their traditional religions; third, undertakes a biblical study relevant to the traditions at hand; and finally, critically engages the traditional religion. From this a number of possibilities emerge, including retention of certain aspects considered to be not biblically injurious, rejection of aspects viewed as contrary to the biblical worldview, and finally changing other aspects so that biblical ones are retained while non-biblical points are adapted or rejected, as is considered appropriate.

## Wagenaar's Critique of Bediako

To the extent outlined above, Bediako's methodological approach and subsequent analysis would appear to be firmly grounded within a wider theological framework. Upon deeper analysis however, the stability of his process, expressed above in terms of Hiebert's categorisation, is less certain than anticipated. In a very interesting analysis Hinne Wagenaar undertakes a critical interaction with Bediako's theology,[23] focusing particularly on his engagement with the issues of identity and the pre-Christian past in Africa. In this analysis Wagenaar is certainly sympathetic to the basic thrust of Bediako's work, though he notices an underlying, unresolved tension. Wagenaar explores this through three key cultural examples: the use of African Names for God; the use of Sacral Power; and the long-standing nub of contention, Polygamy.

He observes two levels of interaction in Bediako's work. At a theological level Bediako advocates an essential continuity with traditional customs and religions, following the lead of scholars such as Mbiti. However, at the level of practical example his illustrations demonstrate a decidedly more ambivalent attitude towards these issues. In practice he seems to advocate an essential discontinuity on key points: 'There seems to be an imbalance between Bediako's wish of being open to the traditions and his actually critical and even negative attitude.'[24]

At first sight, analysed under Hiebert's model, this objection points to a negative evaluation of Bediako's judgement. Critical contextualisation is a process of ongoing critical interaction in which the gospel meets, confronts and adjudicates on the different elements of culture. As such it is often a matter of judgement, on the part of the Christian community, as to which elements are to be accepted and which rejected. At one level therefore, under Hiebert's model, Bediako could be seen as inappropriately exercising his personal judgement such that he acts at odds with his prevailing theological ethos.

This, however, is a far too simplistic explanation. Wagenaar's critique speaks of a general attitude of acceptance being circumvented at the point

**23** H Wagenaar, 'Theology, Identity and the Pre-Christian Past: A Critical Analysis of Dr. K. Bediako's Theology from a Frisian Perspective', *International Review of Mission*, LXXXVIII/351 (Oct 1999), pp. 364-380.

**24** Wagenaar, 'Theology, Identity and the Pre-Christian Past', p. 369.

of practical interaction by a general attitude of, at best, ambivalence. This point is strengthened when we note Wagenaar's discovery that practical examples do not abound in Bediako's work. In fact, it is necessary to trawl through Bediako's writings to find them. This makes it all the more notable that amongst this scarcity of examples Bediako demonstrates a general approach conversant with a critical and negative attitude. The implications of this are significant. It implies that Bediakos' theoretical construct does not carry through into his real life analysis, that there is an essential disparity between his theory and practice.

This is just one explanation of the Wagenaar analysis though. Another possible explanation lies in the contention that Hiebert's explanation of critical contextualisation is an inadequate tool for this investigation. His approach is useful as a means for describing the general approach Bediako utilises, but it is perhaps insufficiently nuanced to allow for analysis beneath the level of theoretical framework. If this were the case, then Hiebert's approach would seem to struggle to critique adequately its own adherents as the level of application shifts from the general to the specific. One plausible explanation for such a weakness lies in the lack of mechanisms Hiebert provides for analysing how critical contextualisation is actually engaged. His model is a good example of a simple explanatory model that lacks the ability to fully dialogue with its own case studies.

Nonetheless Wagenaar's critique has highlighted a significant potential problem with Bediako's argument that, under the framework provided by Hiebert's model, we are unable to fully investigate. It is appropriate therefore to search for an alternative model that provides some assistance.

## Kaplan and a Continuum

Interestingly Kaplan strikes this same problem when he examines the question of the Africanization of missionary Christianity. A key consideration for him was the inadequacy of blanket terms, such as 'adaptation' and 'incarnation', for analytical purposes. He found that such terms tended to hide more than they revealed, as indeed was the case with Hieberts' generic approach. Kaplans' typological analysis therefore eschewed the generic style represented by Hiebert for a more extensive set of categorisations, in his case dividing contextualisation into six primary adaptation modes.[25]

His approach is essentially historical, depicting the various modes missionaries have employed for their engagement with the local context. It is noticeable that, in his argument, what he is presenting does not constitute a plurality of postures. On the contrary, it represents a continuum running from the naïve attitude of 'toleration' through to the most sophisticated mode of 'incorporation'. This final adaptation mode is a very provocative suggestion in light of the modern missionary movement. Through it he suggests an African incorporation into the biblical story on a par with western

25 Steven Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', p. 167.

incorporation into it.[26]

While African theologians certainly agree with this contention, there exists a subtle problem with Kaplan's statement of it. Justin Upkong pinpoints the matter in a very interesting commentary. In his analysis he tackles two streams of inculturation theology that he deems inadequate when applied to the African context.[27] The pertinent stream for our purposes is labelled the 'philosophic' approach. He characterizes this as an inculturation process predicated on the application of a philosophical system. Upkong uses an applied example to argue against this stream, that example being the process Placide Temples describes in his book *Bantu Philosophy*.[28]

Upkong objects to this process for two major reasons. The first is that it does not adequately deal with the exigencies of the African situation, failing to offer a holistic solution to *both* the religious and secular sensibilities of the African context.[29] The second is that while it seeks to present an African philosophic alternative, it nonetheless proceeds from an inherently western perspective. Upkong argues persuasively that while philosophic concepts are an essential foundation for doing theology, this does not necessarily imply the validity of a systematic philosophical approach.

Upkong's arguments are important considerations here because Kaplan, in advocating the 'incorporation' mode of adaptation, relies on the work of Placide Temples.[30] In Placide's analysis, he notes that 'Jamaa represents a reinterpretation rather than a mere restatement of the Christian message',[31] and that 'The numerous African concepts and teachings incorporated into the Jamaa belief system and ritual … are held to be of universal value and to be worthy of incorporation into the wider church'.[32] The key words here are 'reinterpretation' and 'incorporation'. Kaplan views their interaction as resulting in a shift from '… an attempt to express existing Christian ideas in an African idiom…' to a mindset where '… the Jamaa seeks to express new truths'.[33]

Clearly this aim is lauded by Upkong, although the process Kaplan envisages as bringing it about does not, in Upkong's eyes, develop a truly African Christian understanding. Indeed it cannot, as it proceeds from an

**26** Research conducted in 1990-1992 in Malawi demonstrates the great difficulties Africans are having in comprehending this; refer Kenneth Ross, 'Preaching in Mainstream Christian Churches in Malawi: A Survey and Analysis', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXV/1 (Feb 1995), pp. 3-24.

**27** Upkong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach to Inculturation Theology', pp. 100-124.

**28** Upkong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach to Inculturation Theology', p. 102.

**29** See also Zablon Nthamburi, 'Toward Indigenization of Christianity in Africa: A Missiological Task', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 13/3 (Jul 1989), p. 114 for a similar point.

**30** See his discussion Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', pp. 180-182.

**31** Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', p. 181.

**32** Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', p. 182.

**33** Kaplan, 'The Africanization of Missionary Christianity', p. 182.

inherently western foundation—that of engaging theological concerns through a dichotomous philosophic system that looks only to the religious categories of life rather than life in its holistic understanding.[34]

Space does not permit a full discussion of this very interesting critique, particularly given its implications for western theological processes. However, one general point is pertinent to this discussion. Upkong's analysis is possible because of the historical development that has occurred in African theological thinking.[35] His critique was foreshadowed in the works of Lamin Sanneh. In 1983 Sanneh wrote a perceptive article in which he promulgated a distinctively African view of recent theological and missiological history in Africa.[36] His central thesis was that Africa is coming of age in the ongoing outworking of the universal gospel message. Sanneh argues that western mission history in Africa actually represented an active engagement with the *missio Dei*, rather than just the imperialistic, western ethnocentric Christian enterprise it is often portrayed as.

If indeed the African engagement proceeded from *missio Dei*, then the need to understand it through the western frame of reference is circumvented for Africans.[37] God is about a new work and it is more important to understand this than it is to comprehend the historical process of transmission that gave rise to it. In fact, understanding it through primarily western categories potentially robs the universal church of important new understandings. Bediako represents one theologian keen to highlight this. As Bediako notes, '… the divine initiative that precedes and anticipates historical mission, concedes the salvific value of local religions.',[38] a very provocative suggestion in western eyes.

Here we have now travelled full circle and returned to one of Bediako's dominating themes, the essential nature of African primal religions in understanding African Christian identity. In the process, we have arrived at a much better understanding of his underpinning logic. What has been gained in the discussion above is an important insight. Upkong's implied critique of Kaplan's position is founded upon a deeper layer of theological engagement with African culture than previous contextual models have allowed for. Sanneh lights the way by

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**34** Ben Knighton, 'The meaning of God', pp. 120-121, notes the difficulties posed by language even before philosophic categories of discussion can proceed.

**35** Zablon Nthamburi, 'Toward Indigenization of Christianity in Africa', for example, notes that in African religious history Placide Tempels and E. W. Smith '… were an exception in an age or [sic] rhetorical misrepresentation of African beliefs', p. 114.

**36** Sanneh, 'The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission', pp. 165-171.

**37** Bediako deals with Sanneh's thesis quite extensively in his article 'Translatability and the Cultural Incarnations of the Faith', Scherer, J.A., and Bevans, S.B., eds, *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 3: Faith and Culture* (New York, Orbis, 1999), pp. 146-158.

**38** Bediako, 'Translatability', p. 170.

noting that the African engagement arose from western participation in *missio Dei*, ushering in a qualitatively different Christian experience, an experience akin to the gospel bursting the wineskins of Judaic election in order to reap a harvest in fertile Gentile fields.[39] Kaplan saw this change but lacked a full understanding of its radicality relative to western theological processes.

## Stephen Bevans

Upkong's proposed solution to the problem provides an important clue as to where we may be able to find another suitable modular approach to continue our analysis of Bediako. Upkong continues his analysis by going on to advocate what he calls a Sociological-Anthropological Approach—an approach based on what Stephen Bevans calls a praxis model.[40] Bevans promulgates a very interesting typological framework. Instead of envisaging a continuum, he is quite explicit in advocating a plurality of options for 'adaptation', or, in Bevan's own language, for engaging in contextual theology. Importantly, his typological breakdown of contextual theology avoids the simplicity that rendered Hiebert's model uninformative, while his inclusion of avowedly non-western categories provides for analytical approaches that Kaplan's construct did not allow for.

When Bediako's theology is compared with the six models Bevans outlines, some very helpful results emerge. What is immediately and explicitly clear is that Bediako uses translation terminology to define his stance. This can be seen, for example, when he speaks of '... the critical notion that the Christian faith is capable of "translation" into African terms without injury to its essential content'.[41]. This is an immediate indicator that Bevans' Translation Model is perhaps the most appropriate framework to begin with. The parallels between Bediako and the Translation model are in fact numerous and explicit.

From the start Bediako is deeply concerned to note the importance of language in the developing theology of the African continent, noting that '... the possession of the Christian Scriptures in African languages ... be regarded as the single most important element of the Western missionary legacy in Africa ...' He goes on then to comment that 'This ... ensured that a deep and authentic dialogue would ensue between the gospel and African tradition ... in the categories of local languages, idioms and world-views.'[42] This expresses the heart of the translation model, the gospel, conceived of as a supracultural kernel, being trans-

**39** Setiloane's poetry vividly captures the pathos of the historical transmission. Refer Edward Schroeder, 'Lessons for Westerners from Setiloane's Christology', *Mission Studies*, 4/II-2 (1985), pp. 8-14, esp. pp. 11-12.

**40** Upkong, 'Towards a Holistic Approach', pp. 107-121.

**41** Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', p. 14.

**42** Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', p. 17. Lamin Sanneh, 'The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission', pp. 166-167 is also quite explicit about this.

lated through a process of dynamic equivalence into the receiving culture.

A very interesting aspect of Bediako's approach, in light of the translation model, is the starting point advocated by Bevans. He depicts adherents of this model as beginning from the perspective of a supracultural husk that is applicable across all contexts. This is not an immediately obvious distinctive of Bediako's approach. Bediako certainly does uphold the supracultural nature of the gospel message. However, his methodological approach is not entirely consistent with what Bevans suggests an adherent of the translation model would adopt.

Bediako, in fact, begins with the African search for identity, the need for an authentically African expression of the Christian faith. In essence it is personal and communal experience that is driving Bediako's theological search. When we consider his perspective on African primal religions, that they are preparatory for the gospel, it becomes clear that Bediako is methodologically outworking the Anthropological Model Bevans describes. As Bevans notes, '… the practitioner of the anthropological model looks for God's revelation and self-manifestation as it is hidden within the values, relational patterns, and concerns of a context.'[43]

Like the Translation Model so too the Anthropological model has numerous points of connection with Bediako's theology, though this time in terms of his theological methodology. So, for instance, Bevans accurately depicts Bediako's approach when he notes, '… the real work involves digging deep into the history and tradition of the culture itself, "for it is primarily there that the treasure is found"'[44] and later '… while acceptance of Christianity might challenge a particular culture, it would not radically change it'.[45] It is clear from these examples that Bediako is also utilising what Bevans describes as the Anthropological Model.

As a preliminary observation it is important to note that Bevans acknowledges the often fluid nature of the situations theologians face. In view of this he explicitly recognizes that the models he presents actually represent a plurality, and are therefore inclusive in nature, with theologians able to exhibit aspects of more than one model.[46] Certainly Bediako represents an excellent example of precisely this approach. It should be noted here though, that Bevans does not go on to delineate how such an approach might work in practice, nor does he engage in discussion of any fundamental incompatibilities between the models. These are important issues that bear further analysis and consideration, although to do so here would move beyond the scope of our purposes so such discussion is deferred to another time.

In terms of how these two models interact in Bediako's analysis, we can

**43** Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 56.

**44** Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 56-57, finishing with a quote from Rush.

**45** Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 57.

**46** Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 139.

note that on the one hand he is dedicated to the supracultural nature of the gospel message. However, on the other hand, he is equally dedicated to the notion that African primal culture is fundamentally good in a religious sense, containing within it a very high level of preparation for the gospel message.[47] At first sight this presents a significant tension, a point between which adherents of the Translation model and the Anthropological model ostensibly clash. Wagenaar, as noted above, depicted just such a fundamental tension within Bediako's writings.

On the one hand he is open to the theological importance of the African primal religions and cultures, while on the other he is highly critical of key aspects of these religions and cultures when they engage with the gospel at specific points. Restated in terms of Bevans' models, this is an expression of a clash between Bediako's methodology, founded upon the Anthropological model predisposing him to a positive understanding of culture, and his theological construct, operating from within a Translation model framework, leading him to hold a suspicious and critical attitude to engagement with cultural practices. It is perhaps this tension that prompts Wagenaar to comment: 'Reading Bediako's work, I constantly experienced a tension between the critical African theologian and the traditional biblical evangelist.'[48]

Under the aegis of these two models it is easy to see that the apparently dichotomous behaviour Wagenaar discerns is, in fact, the focal point of a fundamental clash of models in Bediako's theology. While theoretically the interpenetration of these two models, under Bevans' magnanimous gaze, is merely a feature of the pluralistic nature of the contextual models he puts forward, in practice the interaction between one and the other is manifestly wrought with complex tensions. In Bediako's case the tension lies unresolved, although Wagenaar does note a recent softening in Bediako's approach. This softening can legitimately be stated as the Anthropological model's more culturally engaging language of recognition replacing the Translation model's tendency towards an asserted, propositional interaction in Bediako's work.[49]

## Implications

This paper has taken the opportunity to investigate several models of contextual theology through a case study methodology, in this instance by examining the work of an individual African theologian. Three key types of models were examined. The first was the generic model advocated by Hiebert, which provided a broad descriptive framework of contextual theologising. While certainly useful at this general level it lacked the ability to engage and critique at the level of the particular. This weakness severely limits the use-

**47** See also Jehu-Appiah, 'The African Indigenous Churches', pp. 410-420.

**48** Wagenaar, 'Theology, Identity and the Pre-Christian Past', p. 373.

**49** Wagenaar, 'Theology, Identity and the Pre-Christian Past', p. 373.

fulness of the model as an analytical tool in the contemporary theological climate, a climate in which the particular is increasingly emphasised.

The next model examined was that of the typological continuum presented by Kaplan. While more focused on the particular, it too struggled to provide a convincing explanation of the specific case study being analysed. In large part this was a result of an inherent western philosophical bias present within its framework, a bias rejected by African theologians as not being particularly relevant to their context. This has significant implications for the way the West interacts with an African, or indeed any Two-Thirds world, theologian. On the face of it, from a western perspective, it can be said that Kaplan's construction of his continuum seemed a very plausible and authentically African attempt at contextual theologising, one that markedly stretched the western theological comfort zone.

From an African perspective, however, the framework Kaplan offered was still built upon a western foundation. It may have stretched to the very edge of that foundation, becoming an uncomfortable prospect for western theologians, but it never actually challenged those foundations. For many African theologians though it is precisely these foundations that are the problem. For them the western philosophic approach is too narrow a platform upon which to build a truly biblical framework for theologising in the African context. The question this naturally raises is whether or not the western foundations are in fact sufficient for western theological purposes? Some work is being undertaken in this direction but, up to now, western theologians have paid insufficient attention to this issue.[50]

The third model examined was that of Stephen Bevans, which proved to be the most useful analytical tool examined by this paper. When applied to a particular context, it managed to describe both the generic theological processes being undertaken while concurrently providing a means by which the validity and usefulness of these processes could be examined. 'Models of Contextual Theology' is therefore an excellent example of a modular approach to contextual theology that is both built around particular case studies and validated by reference to specific case studies. It therefore stands as a significant milestone in the continuing development of our understanding of contextual theologising.

Having briefly noted some of the implications arising out of this paper, regarding the modular approach to contextual theology, there remains but one further set of implications to note. The interaction of models and case studies can, and should properly be, a two-way dialogue. The preceding implications arose out of a dialogue in which the model under consideration was analysed in relation to its validity and usefulness for a specific case study. We need not stop here, for we can reverse the direction of dialogue

**50** There are some notable exceptions; for example Lesslie Newbigin provides an excellent challenge of western philosophic foundations in all of his later works and Charles Kraft is increasingly looking provocatively at issues of relationship and spiritual power in contextualization.

and consider the implications these models have for the case study, in this instance Kwame Bediako's theological processes.

Arguably the most important insight to emerge is the need for individual theologians to properly understand the theoretical foundation upon which they stand. From Bediako's writings it does not seem as if the tensions highlighted by Wagenaar were the result of a self-conscious stance; rather it appears as if they have emerged as a product of the process by which Bediako engaged his culture with the gospel. It is only once they were examined through a grid, such as that provided by Bevans, that their source and full implications became clear. In this instance the application of modular contextual theology provides a mechanism by which the theological foundations and processes of a theologian can be further refined, or, perhaps, maintained, though now in an explicitly self-conscious manner.

Having said this, it must be noted that this is no simple process. Examining Bediako through Bevans' eyes has been instructive, although the positive evaluation implicit in the foregoing analysis is predicated upon a particular view of Bevans' models. This view can be summarised as Bevans' contention that there exists a true plurality amongst the models he presents, and that one can in fact mix the models. This is by no means a given. The differences between the Translation and Anthropological models are significant and should not be readily overlooked. At a crude level these differences are analogous to the quite significant differences between the understandings of revelation and theology plaguing Evangelical and Ecumenical interactions. In key respects these positions can be broadly categorised as stemming from a Translation versus Anthropological model difference of perspective.

Without seeking to weigh Bediako with the heavy weight of expectation it is perhaps not impertinent to suggest that the struggle we find present in Bediako's theology reflects a much broader malaise in the current study of contextual theology. Resolving this malaise is not likely to be a fast or comfortable process. Nonetheless, as individuals grapple with these issues in their local contexts, it is to be hoped that significant insights will emerge and, perhaps, over time, a consensus will develop. Whether this is a consensus of an acceptable plurality or the emergence of a dominant methodology is less important than the ongoing spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ to and through the cultures of our world. Bediako, for one, is certainly a theologian worthy of engaging such a task and we look forward to watching how his theology develops from here.

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# Biblical Hermeneutics in Relation to Conventions of Language Use in Africa: Pragmatics Applied to Interpretation in Cross-cultural Context

Jim Harries

**Keywords:** *Missiology, discourse analysis, Luo people, Bible translation, African theology, spiritual warfare.*

Discussions on hermeneutics have rarely considered one very important factor. That is, *how* words are *used*. Such is the bread and butter of the academic disciplines of pragmatics and discourse analysis. I would like to consider the implications of this in today's 'shrinking' world, especially in relation to biblical interpretation and Christian teaching and mission in Africa.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and its associates in Bible translation have undoubtedly done an impressive job in taking the Scriptures into diverse languages around the world. Somewhat in close sequence to possession of Scriptures in mother tongue, we also however find emergence of New Religious Movements or, in the African context, AICs (African Indigenous Churches). We can ask ourselves why such apparently non- or marginally orthodox movements are so quick to emerge if the translation process has been so successful? It would seem that indigenous people do not always come to understand or apply (i.e. use) the Scriptures 'as they should'.

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## Scriptures Boost Traditional Beliefs

A good clue as to why this should be is given by Sanneh, who points out that far from the translation of scriptures being a means of oppressing 'traditional cultures', it very often results in their revival![1] On careful consideration this should not surprise us as Bible translators into mother-tongues are of course 'forced' to use terms that already have deep and wide roots in the pre-existing way of life. Finding such in written form in a book said to have originated in God himself is likely to be a boost to traditional rituals and practices, now given official Christian legitimacy and sanction. It is ironic that churches and their Bible teaching, often considered to be destructive of traditional cultures, are shown by Sanneh as being rather the refuge for the latter!

A few example of how this works in the Luo language of Western Kenya written from an indigenous African perspective, may illustrate this point:

- 'Holy Communion' is a new, foreign and no doubt powerful white-man's ritual but becomes *sap ruoth*—a memorial celebration for a departed Luo chief.
- 'God' who was a mysterious ambivalent fellow originating in distant parts of the globe who one can barely fathom, is now clearly identified as *Nyasaye*—the very life-force that has guided our people for generations.
- That strange looking nuclear family need no longer be our model for Christian living, as the Old Testament is replete with examples of big men having multiple wives.
- Confusing teachings on science and physical causality need no longer be taken seriously, as numerous biblical examples make it clear that at the root of suffering and misfortune is no less than *ketho kwer*, which we (i.e. the Luo) know to be breaking the laws handed down by our ancestors.

## Lip Service not Matched by Action!

Some of the above is old hat to missiologists. Although it must be said—it is deceptive in its penetration and power. That is, while a missiologist may give lip service and recognition to the above, his/her mind gravitates back to his own roots when giving a morning devotion or preparing a message to share at the Sunday service. (Such 'gravitating back' can, in my view, be avoided to some extent if a non-western language is used.) The same of course happens in our theological seminaries that are dominated by western texts and inputs. In other words, even the degree of recognition of what happens once the Scriptures are indigenised has much less impact than it 'ought' when it comes to their mainstream interpretation and application in the church.

The question is being asked as to why theological education around the continent of Africa continues to be in English, French and Afrikaans despite the availability of vernacular Bibles,

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**1** Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: the missionary impact on culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 83.

and despite the fact that living churches on the continent mostly operate in African languages?[2] This is an important question. Its answer, at the moment I suspect, has more to do with economic power than reasoned theology. Seminaries will continue to be in cloud–land, considering sets of questions foreign to peoples' experience, until this question is addressed.

Teaching in cloud-land may not be so bad in itself. But we need to remember that students at such seminaries are trying to *apply* what they are taught. Being unfamiliar with deep lexical and cultural implications of even commonly used English words, our African students assume 'new' English words to be equal to African equivalents. (There are, of course, also many other reasons as to why what is taught in seminaries may not be very practical for the African context. This much discussed area is not the major focus of this essay.) As a result, applying seminary knowledge becomes at least disruptive, at worst catastrophic for the church.

As in many areas of cross-cultural activity, lip service is these days often given to vast existing cultural differences. Implementing such lip-service becomes the difficult next step that is rarely taken, especially by monolinguists (or monoculturalists). More serious issues lie under the surface. Scholars have recently become astutely aware of issues concerning language *use*. This is considered in detail in the discipline of pragmatics, which is an important theoretical foundation for this work.[3]

## The Folly of Inter-sport Language

A good illustration to help a monolingual person to understand the dilemmas that arise when we take account of pragmatics is to think of sport. The English-speaking world knows of many sports and games. Each one has its own vocabulary! In cricket we have *out, over, run* and *innings*. In football we have *goal, defence*, a *shot* and a *free kick*. In tennis we have a *set*, a *match*, a *racquet* and a *serve*. Now imagine that these games represent different peoples with distinct languages. One people and language of tennis, one of football and one of cricket.

If a football player says to a cricket player that he scored a goal, the cricket player won't have a clue what he is talking about. So the football player must learn the language of the cricket player. Instead of reporting that he scored a goal, the football player must say that he got a run. But hang on, you may say, a goal is not the same as a run! And that is exactly the problem!

Then it comes to be the turn for the cricket player to explain to a football

2 Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'African Christianity, the Bible and Theology', in Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke and Peter M. Renju (editors), *Bible Translation and African Languages* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), pp. 161-176.

3 For more details, see Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge Text Books in Linguistics) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Geoffrey H. Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London and New York: Longman 1983).

player that the ball hit the wicket, and thus he was out. Football fields do not have wickets, but do have goal posts, and players are not knocked out, but the ball can go out. So from saying the ball hit the wicket and the player was out, we get the ball hit the goal post and went out—in other words a corner was awarded! Having a corner awarded in a football match is quite different from a batsman walking out at the end of his innings. And that is exactly the problem!

In tennis a powerful serve that hits the net has to be retaken, as it is counted a failure. In explaining this to a football player, the tennis player is forced to say 'powerful shot' instead of 'a powerful serve'. When the football player hears that the powerful shot has put the ball into the net, he may rejoice at this, leaving the tennis player askance!

Those examples (that could be multiplied many times) are powerful illustrations of translation blunders which I face constantly here in Africa. Such things happen constantly when English and African people converse. They are also what I find in the essays written by African students using English. African students using English write like a cricket player who is used to describing a cricket match using the terminology of football. When I mark the essay using my knowledge of football, I see all the familiar terms being used. The terms do not seem to be used in the right way, but I give the writer the benefit of the doubt and give him a grade as I hardly want to be accused of being biased.

But does this analogy of sport hold up? After all, one person can learn to play many different sports, and adjust accordingly. If I play football I say 'good goal', whereas if I play cricket I say 'good run', and there is no confusion.

We would of course never be so foolish to teach someone the language of a sport without also teaching them how that language is used and the rules of the game. There is no 'inter-sport' language. Every sport, has its own language. Note that even if the same word(s) are used in different sports, the way they are used and their meaning varies significantly! A football player, a rugby player and a cricket fielder can all 'catch the ball', but for the football payer it is a foul, for the rugby player very normal, and for the cricket player means that the batsman is out!

Anyone inventing an 'inter-sport' language would be laughed out of town! So why don't we laugh when English is used as an international language? Perhaps we ought to laugh more, or cry! In fact, the impracticality of such 'inter-sport' sharing of wisdom illustrates why western theology introduces confusion into the African church and why it is actually often best for an African theological student to learn *not* to apply what he/she has been taught.

## Language is Meaningful only in Use

We are now beginning to delve below the tip of the proverbial iceberg in terms of language usage and hermeneutics. A raft of issues regarding daily language practice now need to be unearthed.

The ongoing concealment of these

issues is rooted in false conceptions of the nature of language. These conceptions that have spread around the world helped by western economies appear to be rooted in notions of Greek philosophy and of the enlightenment. The misconceptions suppose that language is a bridge between a person and a physical and social world 'out there'. Because, barring a few variations in climate and skin colour, the physical and social worlds appear to be the same around the world, and so also language. As a result, it is supposed, that as I talk to my mother about issues affecting my neighbours and friends, I am doing what young men do the world over.

But do they? In this instance clearly not in today's world. Many urban dwellers have little clue as to the lives of their neighbours, and are caught up in media presentations of what should be live-issues, and networks of friends rooted less and less in geographical proximity. But what then are friends?

'She is my friend' is a phrase all men know to use with caution (except of their wives) even within the confines of western English. Men need to be very careful how they even express themselves regarding fellow men, as 'we had a friendly time together' can be quickly misunderstood, and men holding hands as they walk is similarly quickly interpreted to mean something that Africans who do this habitually are shocked by! 'My friend' I am often told in African uses of English as a prelude to an uninhibited blunt request for funds by a complete stranger. 'He is my friend' is stronger than 'he is a friend of mine', and then we have, 'he is just a friend'. A good friend implies that you have been helped, but there is presumably no bad friend. A husband and wife can be 'friends of mine', but the wife is definitely not 'my friend' although I 'am friendly' (in moderation) whenever I meet her.

There are clearly acceptable and unacceptable, advisable and ill advised ways of *using* the word friend. To give a definition of friend is far from adequate to enable understanding of the *use* of the word. In fact, appropriate detailed knowledge of *uses* of the word 'friend' clearly arises from a comprehension of all factors pertaining to relationships within a community! How often does this apply?

'Christians do not greet each other by saying "how are you" but by saying "Praise the Lord"', an old lady told me in a Luo village (translation from *Dholuo*). So on meeting a fellow Christian, while being unsure as to whether one has already greeted them, one can ask, '*ase pako kodi ruoth?*', being, 'Have I already praised with you the Lord?' meaning, 'Have I greeted you yet (this morning)'? Again, knowing the *meaning* of *ruoth opaki* will give an Englishman little idea of its *use*.

The common western conception that words are there to *prepare for* a doing, well illustrated by the widespread use of behavioural objectives in educational curriculum planning,[4] seems to fly in the face of Austin's realization that we do things *with* words, and that applies really to *all* words![5]

**4** For example, see Gary A. Davis, *Educational Psychology Theory and Practice* (London: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 305-329.

**5** J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 52.

What are the implications of such a discovery, if indeed it is true that the role of words is not primarily in *meaning* but in *doing*? Why should I pay attention to a word anyway, if it is not going to do anything for me?

The reason the relationship between meaning and doing seems to be confused in the western worldview would seem to be connected to the preeminence of a mechanical perception of the world. A carburettor by itself does nothing, but knowing its place in an engine and knowing where to put other similarly 'useless' bits, results in a powerful driving force. So words are taken as meaning things that only 'do' something when correctly combined with other words.

## Ringing Bells in the African Theology Department

What would be the implication of the absence of such a mechanical worldview? That is, of a worldview where there is no perception of postponed doing? In a sense we are here referring to Mbiti's much maligned suggestion that in Africa there is no future.[6] Instead of taking words as meaning things which later in some elaborate complexity do some doing, every word is expected to be un-postponed doing. An accumulation in the doing-ness of many words is what results in the desirable way of being.

Some bells should here be being rung in the African theology department! In many African languages someone who is sick, if asked how he is, will say 'a little bit', thereby acknowledging that his life-force level is low. In African thinking, salvation is a boost or guarantee to that life-force. This is why a saved person cannot possibly get sick, and why salvation is considered an ongoing or frequently repeated experience. (I am aware that in saying this many westerners will consider me in theological error. Yet I am saying that this is a natural and logical conclusion if the Bible is read in many African languages.) Again, African people are noted for their liking of long church services, as those many words continue to add to force levels. Any absence of a morality identified in African Christianity[7] clearly arises through words being valued for what they *do*, and not in constructing an understanding that can later be considered to be moral.

Examples of profound differences in word usage's between cultures can easily be multiplied. I can put my finger at random in a dictionary to find words, and explain how usage of those word differs between African (Luo) and Western (British) cultures:[8]

- I find the word '*mistrust*'. This word is often used to malign a fellow westerner but in the Africa that I know this word is 'normal'. Peoples' hearts being by default

6 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 15-22.

7 See for example Keith Ferdinando, 'Biblical Concepts of Redemption and African Perspectives of the Demonic' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Council for National Academic Awards, London Bible College, UK, 1992), p. 284.

8 I have used Carole A. Capen 1998, *Bilingual Dholuo—English Dictionary Kenya* (Tucson, Arizona 1998).

guided by 'bad' forces,[9] makes mistrust the default position.

- '*Bullet*' is in English a thing that hits another, hence a bulletin board brings information and an innocent person can be found by a bullet from a gun. A bullet (*lisasi* in *Dholuo*, from *Kiswahili*) in Africa implies that your fate has caught up with you. The bullet wouldn't have hit you if you hadn't erred in your relationship with the forces of the universe, for example by saying the wrong thing to someone or breaking a taboo. (Many scholars have pointed out that in Africa death, as also suffering, is always caused by sorcery, spirits or a curse.)[10]
- '*Self-love*' is a desirable feature necessary for being able to love others in western thinking, but must be bad in the Luo way of thinking as it implies a reduced investment to the common good. Mbiti goes so far as to suggest that love is a rarely used word in Africa.[11]

In conclusion we can say that, in a different culture, every word is *used* differently!

**9** Note the popularity in Africa of the book, *Moyo wa Binadamu* (English = 'The heart of man'). *Moyo wa Binadamu* (Arusha: Kituo cha Maandiko Habari Maalum—Kimahama, 1996).

**10** John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* ( Second Edition) (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1991), p. 117.

**11** Mbiti, *African Religion*, p. 38.

## Conventional Hermeneutics Falls Far Short in the Cross-Cultural Environment!

So what is the relation of the above to the discipline of hermeneutics? In the cross-cultural sense, I hope I have made it clear that the numerous detailed considerations dealt with under the heading of hermeneutics, even though they may all be important, are only a small part of the interpretational differences one is faced with in a cross-cultural environment. Ignoring differences in language usage has been a primary cause of unsuspected shocks, causing AICs to emerge from mission churches.[12]

Two further examples can serve to emphasize the point. Take the words of Ezekiel 31:6a: 'All the birds of the air nested in its boughs' (NIV). I think of the words of an old lady who is my neighbour in my African village home. Her late husband liked trees, and therefore preserved many of them and planted others on his land. This has resulted in our having many songbirds all around us. I rejoice in the dawn chorus, but 'winyogo goyona koko' (Dholuo) said the old lady, literally translatable as 'those birds hit me with their din' or 'these many birds disturb me with their unpleasant noise'. I have at times spotted the old lady chasing away owls from her house at 5.00 in the morning, as owls are said to bring death to the home. She is cutting down trees as fast as she can, partly so as to reduce the bird population. Her use of

**12** Application is of course much wider to many fields of human knowledge that are communicated cross-culturally.

the term 'bird' shows that to this lady 'birds' are akin to devils. Understanding this remarkable change of use of a common word can be ascertained only by attention to use of language, or a knowledge of culture.

Turning to 2 Chronicles 36:18a: 'He carried to Babylon all the articles from the Temple of God, both large and small…' The picture that this brings to my mind is that of an ornate Anglican church with numerous crosses, candlesticks and items of historical interest; this of course being informed by my having seen numerous illustrations of 'Temples' in various contexts over many years, as well as having visited various churches of this type. I suspect that an informed African interpretation could go in one of two directions. First, 'temple' could be associated with 'shrines' that some African people are known to have as sites for making peace with their ancestors. Thus 'ancestors' have come strongly into the picture. The 'articles' have now become those of African shrines—wooden carvings, perhaps skins, stones, etc. For those African people in which the priest is the household head, the shrines are small and the 'articles' correspondingly few. Alternatively (and perhaps simultaneously) is the notion of temple (in many East African languages *hekalu*, a loan word from Arabic via Kiswahili) as a foreign thing understood by outsiders. Those outsiders have things that are very powerful, understood of course in holistic African cultures as a peculiar power of the gods. So we have an implicit African understanding here that appears in some ways closer to the Ancient Near Eastern one, in which the articles (in the quote above) being carried away implies a severe reduction in power. Although, given African people's meeting with modernity, this 'power' now resembles what we in western English call 'technology' and could be computers, cameras and video machines.

I believe that these examples fall outside of the breadth of conventional hermeneutics. They can be discovered only by exposure to language in use, that is of course inherently related to culture.

Many stark differences in language-use conventions arise between the West and the non-West. The church is disadvantaged in its understanding of the non-western world insofar as it has been swept into the western worldview. It would be supposed therefore that a church that has maintained a 'traditional' theology or ecclesiology may be more able to integrate into the African way. The 'pure westerners' who work in Africa, such as experts in development who work as consultants around the world, can be supposed to be much more seriously disabled in their understanding than church workers.

## Biblical Interpretation in the Light of Language Use Conventions

Such differences in language usage have wide implications for biblical interpretation—that are these days all too often simply glossed over. Scriptural passages can be examined for these differences. I selected Psalm 100:1-3 pretty much at random. I believe that comparable differences in interpretation according to language-

use conventions will be found throughout the Bible. I look at the NIV in comparing an African with a western language-use convention.

Verse 1. *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth*.

African people are widely known for their overt expression of 'emotion', used as a means to bring spiritual or heart power, that may seem senseless to 'rational' people.

Verse 2. *Worship the LORD with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs.*

The Luo have a long tradition of pakruok, which is of praising someone, almost as a pastime. A musician can be given a gift in order to sing in praise of someone. God's seeking praise in this way implies that those praising him are doing so in direct return for favours.

Verse 3. *Know that the LORD is God*.

God in the West is he who 'fills the gaps' which are not filled by science, whereas in much of Africa this is God taking the credit for nature and science. The latter can be known as hono (Dholuo), often translated back into English as 'miracles'.

*It is he who made us and we are his.*

Acknowledging that 'we are his' is a way of asking for help and support in exchange for obedience and service in the patrimonial system widespread in Africa. In western use of such language, this is more a statement of fact.

*We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

The shepherding notion in Africa is seen as provision in every sense, but in the West primarily restricted to the spiritual realm. This is because western society has many of its own mechanisms for physical provision.

… and so on.

The doing power of words is important in peoples' relationship with the super-human or metaphysical realm. God is clearly not dependent on our 'doing', but does value our adoration (Deut. 5:9-11, Psalm 150 etc.), i.e. our heartfelt words. Traditional healing practices clearly make much use of the doing-power of words by using incantations, encouragement and repetitions of key terms for calling on deities and for healing. Healing, it will be noted from the above, is a restoring of vital-force levels, and not foundationally a bio-physical realignment of the body or its parts. Herein lies the nub to much confusion between whether God 'heals' or not in African churches. The word 'heal' is clearly used differently according to cultural context.

## The Contextual Presence of 'Spirits'

In the above examples and more widely the presence of bad forces or evil spirits associated with ancestors who have some grudge must be remembered. Turning to God can have a danger equivalent to that of being 'teacher's pet' in my memory of my secondary education. Playing up to the teacher gives considerable advantages, but the wise pupil always has his classmates (in this case the departed) in mind because, if he is not careful, they can come to trouble him should 'teacher' not be looking! In practice offerings and other due respect must continue to be given to ancestors.

It is this constant presence and presumed activity of those who were once members of our (extended) families that is perhaps the most difficult for westerners to understand in terms of its effect on biblical hermeneutics. In my conception as a westerner my departed ancestors are gone. Even should I dream about them, this will not trouble me in the slightest. This does not apply to the Luo, or many other African people! Imagine having your late grandma watching you lie in bed, your late aunt making your child sick because you have not yet sacrificed a chicken for her, or your great uncle stopping your son from getting a job. Every time you read your Bible you must be thinking how what you read will help you avoid those troublesome spirits. Whenever you talk to someone else you must be careful as to what you say because the spirits are listening. Every dialogue is in effect a 'polylogue', with all that this implies.[13]

The same applies to Bible expositions. It is impossible to tell whether what is said is in response to you as living respondent, or whether it is said to please some over-hearing deceased predecessor, or both. Taking the answer given to the latter as if it is meant for you can be, to say the least, grossly misleading: What if the ancestor has left the command: 'always agree with the Europeans'? A European would in such an instance be wrong to conclude that someone who 'agreed with him/her' actually considered him/her to be correct.

We could take another illustration: picture the conversation between yourself as pastor and your church member whom you meet in town, if you were to start chatting with him, but unbeknown to you he is sitting within earshot of his mistress who up to this time has been unaware that he has a wife and children.

The situations are not helped by the currently widespread perceptions of these 'ancestors' as being evil. In *Dholuo* they are often referred to as *jochiende*, which is also the translation for *devils*.

Egner is amongst those who find a routine deceptiveness in language use in Africa. She found her Ivorian friends regularly making promises that they could not possibly fulfil.[14] Southall tells us that among the Alur people in Uganda there is a 'divergence between stated rules and observed or even recollected behaviour and … great verbal stress by the Alur on regularities which do not obtain in practice'.[15] The Alur's description of their way of ruling their people was found by Southall to be there to impress and not to be truthful. That is, they use language to create (political authority by impressing people with their words) and not to describe (what actually happens)!

## Unique Language Usages

Certain uses of language may be taboo

**13** Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 'Introducing Polylogue' 1-24 in *Journal of Pragmatics* 36(2004) [PDF] <www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma> (accessed 3 Dec 2003).

**14** Inge Egner, 'The Speech Act of Promising in an Intercultural Perspective' (SIL International. <www.sil.org/silewp/2002/001/silewP2002-001.pdf> (accessed 8 Jan 2003).

**15** Aidan W. Southall, *Alur Society: a Study in Processes and Types of Domination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 238.

and unsustainable by local people. Foreigners making such uses may be tolerated, but not imitated. As pregnant women will even avoid speaking of their pregnancy and hide it for as long as possible in cultures such as that of the Luo of Kenya; pastors may also do the same regarding issues in their churches. Open sharing is making oneself vulnerable to mysterious evil (witchcraft) powers.

Mismatches in vocabulary and terms very easily arise cross-culturally. On first arriving in Kenya I was told that there is hardly any witchcraft around these days. As the years went by I found the latter to be very prevalent. Perhaps it was a condemnation of practices such as witchcraft from the West that encouraged people to redefine their practices so as to fall linguistically outside of this much maligned category! A preacher's condemnation of witchcraft may meet with approving nods and smiles, while the very thing he is condemning may be practised but under a different name!

The example of different types of snow often associated with discussions on Sapir and Whorf's theory of language determinism illustrates the possibility of whole realms of meaning and value being lost in the process of translation. (The language of the Eskimos apparently has many distinct terms referring to different types of snow. How does one deal with these distinct terms in a text if translating into English?) Devising English equivalents for Eskimo terms for snow will hardly solve the issue, because English people will see no need for the use of such a bewildering array of terms. Thus vast and critical realms of life's key functions can be omitted by well meaning hermeneuts who are ignorant of language-use conventions. (In the same way that, in the above example, any importance attached to reference to different types of snow will be lost, so also important conventions of language usage can be lost in the course of translation.)

## Conclusion

The ignoring of differences in language-use conventions is no longer acceptable in today's world. The apparent dominance of western culture may have concealed but has not done away with these differences. It may give the deceptive impression that they are no longer there, but they are! They will not disappear overnight, if ever. Language *usages* are not picked up in classrooms or even from textbooks but from participation in peoples' lives. We need a hermeneutics of language usages, or we need to put hermeneutics on the shelf for a while as we explore the impact of the Scriptures on peoples' living cultures. Translating the Bible into African languages has been a valuable exercise. Now we need Christian scholarship *in those languages*. Only thus can conventions of language use, with their manifold implications for hermeneutics, begin to be taken account of in the derivation of non-western theologies.

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# Whither Evangelical Theology? The Work of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen as a Case Study of Contemporary Trajectories

Amos Yong

**Keywords:** *Ecumenical theology, Pentecostalism, Roman Catholic Church, Theology of Religion, Ecclesiology, tradition*

## Introduction

It was the appearance of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's most recent book, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification*, which occasioned the invitation to review his larger corpus in the pages of this journal.[1] My long-standing appreciation for Kärkkäinen's theological work had previously been registered in my collecting, editing, and publishing a set of his essays in book form a few years ago (*TPT*). In the editor's introduction to that book, I noted that Kärkkäinen was fast becoming one of the more important theologians to be reckoned with in our time. He had not only already established himself as one of the leading Pentecostal voices in the academy, but has also been working hard toward an ecumenical rather than merely confessional theology. In the meanwhile, the Kärkkäinen volumes which have appeared in the past few years have not only confirmed but also added to his theological reputation.

As I reflect on Kärkkäinen's wide-ranging publications across the fields of ecumenical and systematic theology

1 All references to Kärkkäinen's books will be cited parenthetically; see the bibliography for a key to the abbreviations. My thanks to David Parker, editor of *ERT*, for the invitation, the opportunity, and the space for this extended engagement with Kärkkäinen's work.

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and more recently in theology of religions, I am led to ask important questions about the present and future directions of evangelical theology. There are actually two sides to this question, one concerning the status of Kärkkäinen as an evangelical theologian, and the other concerning the contested nature of evangelical theology itself. With regard to the former issue, I will shortly attempt to make the case for why Kärkkäinen qualifies as an evangelical theologian. The latter issue, of course, is complex. The boundaries of evangelicalism and, by extension, evangelical theology, have always been debated.[2] Not surprisingly, some have suggested that evangelicals should focus not on boundary disputes but on identifying common and unifying core convictions.[3] However, attaining agreement on what elements are non-negotiable and what are adiaphora has proven elusive, especially since the diverse evangelicalism of the Euro-American west has been complexified with the recent growth of evangelical churches in the eastern and southern hemispheres.[4] The present configuration of evangelicalism as a pluralistic and global phenomenon raises the question about what evangelical theology is or should be as we proceed into the twenty-first century.

In the following pages, I wish to take up this question about evangelical theology today, and do so by looking at the work of Kärkkäinen. I will argue that Kärkkäinen is an evangelical-ecumenical-world theologian in the making, and that it is, in fact, not only possible but even necessary that evangelical theology move in some of the directions charted out by him. The next three sections (II-IV) look at each of these three (evangelical, ecumenical, world) interrelated aspects of Kärkkäinen's theological work, followed by a critical dialogue with Kärkkäinen (V). I conclude in the briefer last section (VI) by asking about how Kärkkäinen's *oeuvre* to date also speaks to the possibilities and challenges regarding the future of evangelical theology in the twenty-first century.

## II—Kärkkäinen as Evangelical Theologian

Prosecution of the thesis that Kärkkäinen is an evangelical-ecumenical-world theologian needs to begin with a look at his evangelical credentials. Resistance to this could come from two directions. For one, Kärkkäinen has identified himself first and foremost as a 'Pentecostal theologian' (formerly) or 'ecumenical theologian' (more recently), and much less as an 'evangelical theologian'. For some evangelicals, the labels 'Pentecostal' and 'ecumenical' signify experientialism and

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**2** Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

**3** E.g., Gabriel Fackre, *Restoring the Center: Essays Evangelical and Ecumenical* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), and Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

**4** See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Pres, 2002), and John M. Hitchen, 'What It Means to Be an Evangelical Today—An Antipodean Perspective,' *Evangelical Quarterly*, part I, 76:1 (2004): 47-64, and part II, 76:2 (2004): 99-115.

enthusiasm on the one hand and liberalism and diminished evangelistic zeal on the other hand, and these traits are considered antithetical to authentic evangelical identity. At another level, for other more conservative evangelicals, Kärkkäinen's affiliation with Fuller Theological Seminary (since 2000) also puts him outside the evangelical orbit, given Fuller's historically more ecumenical and neo-evangelical reputation.[5] Yet it is his location at Fuller that would also lead most theologians in the academy to identify Kärkkäinen as an evangelical. This irony provides further justification for us to utilize the work of Kärkkäinen as a lens to explore the present state of evangelical theology and query about its future directions. I proceed to defend Kärkkäinen as an evangelical theologian along three lines: through a biographical summary of his personal and theological journey, an overview of the evangelical elements of his early theological work, and a survey of his more recent publishing record.

The second of four children, Veli-Matti was born in 1957 to Toivo and Aino Kärkkäinen who were then faithful in the Finnish Lutheran Church. During his teen years, he made a renewed commitment to the Christian faith even as the family was in the process of affiliating with a small Pentecostal congregation in his home town of Kiuruvesi. After receiving his masters in education from the University of Jyväskylä (in Jyväskylä, Finland) in 1982 and working for a few years as a faculty secretary and lecturer at the same institution, Kärkkäinen moved with this wife, Anne-Päivi, and two daughters, Nelli and Maiju, to Pasadena, California, and enrolled in Fuller Theological Seminary's masters in theological studies program. While completing that degree (1988-1989), he pastored a small, independent evangelical church, the Finnish Christian Fellowship, in Los Angeles. Influenced by two prominent Pentecostal professors at Fuller, Dr. Cecil M. Robeck and Dr. Russell Spittler,[6] he took out a membership with the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 1988, and has remained an active member ever since.[7] Upon completing his work at Fuller, Kärkkäinen returned to Jyväskylä where he was ordained by the Full Gospel Church, a classical Pentecostal denomination in Finland, and pastored a Full Gospel Church congregation there from 1989-1991.

In June 1991, Kärkkäinen again moved with his family to Thailand to work as a Full Gospel missionary at the Full Gospel Bible College (FGBC) in Bangkok. At FGBC, Kärkkäinen

**5** George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

**6** TPT was dedicated jointly to Robeck and Killian McDonald. Kärkkäinen's indebtedness to Spittler was expressed in a *festschrift* essay: 'Theology of the Cross: A Stumbling Block to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality?' in Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, eds., *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Russell P. Spittler* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 150-63.

**7** In 1994 and 1995, Kärkkäinen joined the European Pentecostal Theological Association and the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, respectively. He remains an active member in these scholarly organizations as well.

taught a wide range of courses and also served as the college's academic dean. During his tenure, he learned to speak, read, and write in Thai.[8] Upon completing his term assignment, the Kärkkäinens returned to Finland where Veli-Matti began serving at the Pentecostal Full Gospel Iso Kirja-College (in Keuruu), first as professor of theology, and then in 1994 as president. During this time, he matriculated at the University of Helsinki to pursue research in ecumenical theology and dogmatics. Kärkkäinen completed his doctorate in 1998—as a visiting scholar hosted and mentored by Kilian McDonnell and the Institute of Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota—with a dissertation on the first three quinquennia of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, and then wrote his *habilitationschrift* in 1999 focused on the fourth quinquennium of the dialogue.

Both the dissertation and the *habilitationschrift* have been published (*SS* and *AT*). In these volumes Kärkkäinen provides a summary account of the first four rounds of the dialogue between official delegates of the Roman Catholic Church and various Pentecostal scholars and theologians who have been able to participate over the years.[9] Consisting of one week of meetings a year for five years, the dialogues over the first four years included: 1) an initial phase of mutual introduction (1972-1977); 2) many of the 'hard questions' between the two traditions, such as glossolalia, hermeneutics, healing, tradition and experience, Mary (1977-1982); 3) an exploration of various topics related to the church and the communion of saints (1985-1989); and 4) a discussion of evangelization and mission (1990-1996). Three brief comments about the methodological, thematic, and theological aspects of these volumes are important for our purposes.

First, the research and writing of *Spiritus ubi vult spirat* ('the Spirit blows where it wills') and *Ad ultimum terrae* ('to the ends of the earth') emerged out of Kärkkäinen's immersion into the theological traditions of both modern Pentecostalism and the Roman Catholic Church. To be sure, both volumes relied heavily on the Final Reports of the dialogue,[10] the theological position papers written specifically for the dialogue, and the formal

**8** Kärkkäinen also has command of Finnish, his mother-tongue, Swedish, the second national language of Finland, and English and German, besides being able to read Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, and other Scandinavian languages, and having a working knowledge of the biblical and theological languages. He has published and continues to publish widely in Finnish and other Scandinavian languages, especially in popular and ecclesial periodical literature.

**9** Given that most classical Pentecostal denominations have been suspicious of the ecumenical movement, none have formally recognized the dialogue. Pentecostal participants have not been formal representatives of their churches, and usually rely not on denominational sources of support but on either institutional or private funding.

**10** The Final Reports of the first three quinquennia were published in *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:2 (1990): 85-142; the fourth appeared in *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 21:1 (1999): 3-88.

recorded dialogue notes. At the same time, because Kärkkäinen's goal was not just to present a descriptive account of the dialogue but also to provide theological analysis, he took up the task of mastering the growing amount of theological literature being produced by Pentecostal scholarship and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology. The latter not only formed the background for the Roman Catholic approach and contribution to dialogues but also allowed for, and in some instances, sustained the Catholic charismatic renewal movement. In the process, Kärkkäinen familiarized himself with the major Catholic theologians of the last two generations—Rahner, Congar, Schillebeeckx, Ratzinger, von Balthasar, Dulles, Mühlen, Sullivan, Gelpi, and others—which in turn introduced him to the breadth and depth of the Catholic theological tradition. We will see below (III) how this wide-ranging engagement with Catholic theology has served Kärkkäinen as an ecumenical theologian.

Second, Kärkkäinen's comprehensive overview of the first four quinquennia of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue meant that he had was given the opportunity to engage both with the broad scope of the theological spectrum and with the particularly problematic topics dividing the two theological traditions. Over the course of the two volumes, then, we observe the emergence of Kärkkäinen the systematic theologian precisely through his grappling with the challenging issues raised by the dialogue. What is the nature of revelation and of Scripture? What is the role of the tradition, of experience, and of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation? What does Christian initiation consist of, and what role, if any, does Spirit- and water-baptism play in this experience or process? What is the nature of the church, and how do we understand the unity of the body of Christ, the apostolicity of the church, the ordination of its ministers, and the charismatic dimension of the church in relationship to the Kingdom of God? What does the missionary mandate of the church consist of, and how do we define the evangelistic thrust of the church in relationship to culture, social justice, proselytism, and common witness? Throughout, Kärkkäinen deftly negotiates the tension between accurately reporting on the dialogue on the one hand, while providing critical analysis and measured assessment on the other.

This leads, third, to the specifically theological tendencies we see emerging during this early phase of Kärkkäinen's work. While Kärkkäinen repeatedly demonstrates that he recognizes the value and truth of the Catholic perspective, he nevertheless inevitably suggests a way forward which strengthens rather than betrays a Pentecostal theological identity in particular and a theological orientation in line with confessing church (Free Church) commitments in general.[11] So, biblical

**11** The confessing or Free Church tradition derives from the Anabaptist Reformation. For overviews, see Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), and Barry L. Callen, *Radical Christianity: The Believers Church Tradition in Christianity's History and Future* (Nappanee, In.: Evangel, 1999).

revelation is neither merely mediated by tradition nor merely propositional, but is personally encountered in and through Scripture (revelation's ultimate norm) by the power of the Holy Spirit; Spirit-baptism is limited neither to Christian initiation nor to post-conversion charismatic experiences, but may be suggestive of the fullness of Christian life marked by dynamic Christian witness; the church is neither merely a hierarchical institution nor merely a localized and organic body of believers, but a diverse communion (or fellowship, *koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit; and evangelization is neither exhausted by social concerns nor defined only in terms of personal transformation, but includes both within the wider *missio Dei* that seeks to reconcile the world to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. Of course, differences remain about apostolicity (apostolic succession versus apostolic experience made available today by the Spirit), Mary (*theotokos* versus servant of the Lord), tradition (the papacy and the magisterium versus the priesthood of all believers), conversion (life long process versus sudden experience), and other topics. Kärkkäinen would acknowledge these impasses, but routinely calls for further research.

These early volumes reflect the emergence of Kärkkäinen as an evangelical theologian. They demonstrate the possibility of engaging ecumenical dialogue in ways that compromise neither confessing church commitments in general nor Pentecostal identity in particular. On the contrary, it is precisely in dialogue that one's theological position is deepened even while, paradoxically, a confessionally grounded and yet ecumenically generous understanding of the gospel is forged. Not surprisingly, it was also during this period of research and writing that Kärkkäinen was invited to participate in other evangelical networks: the Lausanne Committee of Finland (1994-present), the AD2000 Committee of Finland (1994-present), the International Consultation on World Evangelization (held in Seoul, Korea, in May 1995), and the International Charismatic Consultation on World Evangelization (1998-present), just to name a few. Arguably, his work on these committees and consultations provided concrete opportunities to test out ideas forged in the theological laboratory. These early publications and ecumenical work vaulted Kärkkäinen to the forefront of Pentecostal theology in dialogue with the broader church and academy. It was partly on these merits that Kärkkäinen was invited to join the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in the fall of 2000.

Since joining the Fuller faculty, Kärkkäinen has increasingly solidified his evangelical theological reputation. This is reflected, in part, in a torrid pace of writing that has resulted in seven other volumes, including a three-part systematics textbook on pneumatology, Christology, and the doctrine of God. Throughout, Kärkkäinen has defined an evangelical theology as one that 'cherish[es] classical Christianity as explicated in the creeds and mainstream confessions' (*C*, 171; cf. *OG*, 81 and *ITR*, 145), and defended 'the more orthodox version of Christianity as opposed to the liberal left wing' (*DG*, 192). Scripture is understood as the infallible touchstone for theological reflection and as the 'normative source

of theology and practice' (*ITR*, 33; cf. *TPT*, 26-28), and five out of the six theology textbooks (the soteriology, three-volumed theology, and theology of religions) begin with biblical overviews. Further, as we shall soon see, Kärkkäinen's early exploration on pneumatological theology in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue has combined with his commitments to a high Christology to produce a robust trinitarian framework for theological reflection. Finally, the missionary and evangelistic zeal characteristic of Kärkkäinen's Pentecostal roots have not diminished, but rather found new and intensified expression in his engagement with the topic of theology of religions (see §IV).

As a result of these developments during his tenure at Fuller, Kärkkäinen has become somewhat of a spokesperson for the evangelical perspective in theology. His invitation to contribute to volumes focused on bringing evangelical theology into dialogue with the wider academy reflects a growing appreciation for his evangelical commitments.[12] A new editorial project launched with his colleague, William Dyrness, and tentatively titled *Global Dictionary of Theology* (under contract with InterVarsity Press), promises to unveil the richness of the evangelical theological landscape as it has developed around the world. To be sure, more conservative evangelicals and certainly most fundamentalists will continue to question Kärkkäinen's evangelical credentials. However, given any moderate (rather than conservative) definition of evangelical, Kärkkäinen's status as an evangelical theologian is difficult to deny.

## III—Kärkkäinen as Ecumenical Theologian

Kärkkäinen's ecumenical journey has continued over the years. He has been involved in the International Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Pentecostals (1996-present), served as a consultant to and member of Faith and Order (Finland, 1994-2001; and USA and Canada, 2001), and participated in consultations and committees of the World Council of Churches ('Toward Common Witness,' 1996; Joint Working Group between the WCC and Pentecostals, 1999-present; 'Ecclesiology and Mission' Consultation, 1999-present; Theological Preparatory Consultation on Mission, 2000-present; Advisory Group for Church and Ecumenical Relations, 2000-present; and Consultation on Healing and Faith, 2002-present). All of this work has confirmed the global horizons for Christian theological reflection nurtured during his formative experiences teaching in Asia

**12** E.g., Kärkkäinen, 'The Uniqueness of Christ and Trinitarian Faith', in Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Christ the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, and Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); 'Christianity and Other Religions', in Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, and Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005); 'Evangelical Theology and Religions', in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and 'Wolfhart Pannenberg', in Steve Carter, ed., *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).

and studying and pastoring in Europe and North America. I suggest that the best way of understanding Kärkkäinen as an ecumenical theologian is precisely by grasping the worldwide scope of his theological vision. Presentation of this global sensitivity is most efficiently accomplished in a brief overview of the methodology and content of Kärkkäinen's trinitarian trilogy, ecclesiology, and soteriology.

I begin with *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (2002) in part because the ecumenical scope of Kärkkäinen's work is here most clearly evidenced. There are three parts to the book. 'Ecclesiological Traditions' includes discussions of the doctrine of the Church in Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, the Reformed churches, the Free churches, the Pentecostal/charismatic orbit, and the ecumenical movement. 'Leading Contemporary Ecclesiologists' include John Zizioulas' 'communion ecclesiology' (Orthodox), Hans Küng's 'charismatic ecclesiology' (Roman Catholic), Wolfhart Pannenberg's 'universal ecclesiology' (Lutheran), Jürgen Moltmann's 'messianic ecclesiology' (Reformed), Miroslav Volf's 'participatory ecclesiology' (Free Church and Pentecostal), James McClendon, Jr.'s 'baptist ecclesiology' (Anabaptist), and Lesslie Newbigin's 'missionary ecclesiology' (evangelical Anglican).

The last part, 'Contextual Ecclesiologies', overviews the Non-Church movement of Kanzo Uchimura in Japan, the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, the feminist church (as represented by Letty Russell and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza), the African Independent (indigenous) Churches, the Shepherding movement (in Pentecostal/charismatic circles), the new 'world church' (in dialogue with Catholic moral and political theologian, Oliver O'Donavan), and the post-Christian Church as 'another city' (in dialogue primarily with Barry Harvey, but in the tradition of prominent theologians like Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder). Already the heavily ecumenical flavour of the ecclesiology is unmistakable.

While much could be said about Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology, its ecumenical potential, I suggest, is partly the result of the specifically pneumato-theological thread that is woven throughout the volume. Eastern Orthodoxy is not only 'Spirit-sensitive', but also understands the church to be constituted by the Spirit. Post-Vatican II Catholic ecclesiology has emphasized the importance of the charisms in the life of the church (thus opening the door to the charismatic renewal in the church, for sure). Lutheran ecclesiology understands the Spirit to make alive both the Word and the sacraments. Obviously, Pentecostal/charismatic ecclesiologies emphasize the church as a 'charismatic fellowship'.

Turning to contemporary ecclesiologists, we see a similar recurrence of pneumatic and charismatic motifs. Zizioulas emphasizes Christology and pneumatology as the dual foundations of the church. Küng writes about the church as the 'creation of the Spirit'. Pannenberg's is a thoroughly pneumatological ecclesiology, an understanding of the church permeated by the person and work of the Spirit. Moltmann wrote a very influential book titled *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (ET: SCM Press, 1977). Volf focuses on the charismatic and trinitarian structure of

the church. McClendon's 'baptist vision' is very similar to those of Pentecostals, emphasizing the 'this is that' correlation between the present experience of the Spirit and the experiences of the earliest Christians as recorded in the book of Acts. And, of course, how can one have a missionary ecclesiology such as Newbigin's without a robust pneumatology? Thus we have Newbigin's portrait of the church as a 'community of the Holy Spirit.' Pneumatic and charismatic themes are evident also in the contextual ecclesiologies, not only in the African 'Spirit-churches', but also in the Shepherding Movement's 'renewal ecclesiology'.

In short, Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology is not just an introductory textbook, although it is that as well. Rather, it can also be read as providing a constructive and ecumenical ecclesiology precisely through the development of a pneumatological theology of the church. The ecumenical nature of the church is established, in this case, not politically, organizationally, or structurally, but theologically (read: pneumatologically). To draw from the biblical metaphor of the gift of the Spirit, the many tongues of Pentecost prefigure the church as a unity constituted by diversity, and, hence, ecclesiology as constituted by the many gifts of the many churches and the many perspectives of her theologians.

Not surprisingly, then, Kärkkäinen's three-volume trinitarian theology begins with the *Pneumatology* (2002). The six chapters introduce the topic, provide a wide range of biblical material, look at developments in the Christian theological tradition, present ecclesiastical perspectives (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal/charismatic, and ecumenical), highlight leading contemporary theologians of the Spirit (the Orthodox Zizioulas, the Catholic Rahner, the Lutheran Pannenberg, the Reformed Moltmann, the biblical pneumatology of Michael Welker, and the evangelical Clark Pinnock), and conclude with what Kärkkäinen called 'contextual' pneumatologies (drawn from recent developments in process theology, liberation theology, ecological theology, feminist theology, and African theology). It is obvious that in a relatively short volume, Kärkkäinen is simply providing a survey of the theological landscape, precisely the task of an introductory theological text.

The approach in *Pneumatology* provides various windows into Kärkkäinen's theological method. First, Kärkkäinen is attuned to the perspectivalism of all theological reflection. This pluralism is not, however, a threat to the theological enterprise. Rather, theology is enriched precisely by the diversity of perspectives. This begins especially with the scriptural data, and is continued in the historical and ecclesiastical traditions. Second, drawing in part from his missionary background, Kärkkäinen recognizes that contemporary theological reflection needs to engage the wide range of perspectives outside the theological mainstream of the Euro-American West. Hence the liberation perspectives of Latin American theologians and the spirit-world perspectives of African theologians need to be given voice. Finally, the entire tenor of Kärkkäinen's initial contribution to a trinitarian theology is dialogical rather than polemical. In contrast to traditional evangelical theologies which either ignore or casti-

gate process, 'green,' or feminist perspectives, Kärkkäinen's attitude is respectful, reflecting a willingness to learn.

Those looking for explicit critical comment will be disappointed. However, those willing to read between the lines will observe that Kärkkäinen has adopted in this volume the posture previously developed in his work on the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue: that discovery of critical points of difference both requires honest acknowledgment and calls for further research. This approach invigorates theology as a personal and communal journey in the Spirit: 'New discoveries, new challenges, new potentialities await' (P, 177).

A similar method and ethos pervades the *Christology* (2003). Part I presents the 'many faces of Christ' in the Bible, while part II surveys the history of Christology from the post-apostolic period through the early councils and medieval developments to the various quests for the historical Jesus initiated during the modern period. Parts III and IV overview contemporary western and non-western (again, Kärkkäinen calls these 'contextual') christologies. The former include short chapters on Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Zizioulas, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Norman Kraus (of the Disciples of Christ tradition), Stanley Grenz, and John Hick.

The latter present an even wider kaleidoscope of christological ideas: process theology as represented in the work of John B. Cobb, Jr., among others; various feminist perspectives; black theology as exemplified in James Cone and the South African theologian, Allan Boesek; postmodernists like Mark Taylor and Ted Peters (who Kärkkäinen suggests represents an 'evangelical version of postmodern Christology'); Latin American liberation theology as seen in Gutierrez, Boff, Gonzalez, and Sobrino; African theology as articulated by John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti, Aylward Shorter, and Benezet Bujo; and Asian theology as proposed by Raimundo Panikkar, Stanley Samartha, Korean Minjung theologians, and Indian Dalit thinkers. As Kärkkäinen's colleague at Fuller, Colin Brown, notes, the *Christology* is 'breathtaking in scope and pace' (back cover).

Three brief comments about Kärkkäinen's *Christology* are in order. First, while Kärkkäinen is focused on the second article of the creed, his wide range of dialogue partners brings with them issues that touch on the entirety of the theological spectrum. Process thinkers have metaphysical concerns, John Hick, and others, engage in christological reflection in light of the challenges of religious pluralism, Bultmannians and Tillichians (among others) are divided over the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, etc. Here, the systematic thinking cultivated in his earlier work allows Kärkkäinen to present the issues clearly without losing a sense of (christological) coherence.

Second, Kärkkäinen's introductory comment is also illuminating: 'the most exciting feature of the current scene is the rise of contextual and/or intercultural Christologies that attempt to speak to specific local needs…or needs of specific groups of people (such as women or the poor)' (*C*, 10-11). Rather than seeing this as a capitulating to a postmodern rela-

tivistic hermeneutic, I suggest that this represents actually the full flowering of an evangelical and Pentecostal commitment to understanding the gospel as transculturally relevant. In this, the motivation is not merely to develop an apologetic against liberalism or any other kind of -ism, but to engage the beliefs and practices of the worldwide church.

This leads, finally, to Kärkkäinen's concluding suggestions for future research, which are themselves instructive: further explication of Christology in a religiously plural world; further extension and assessment of the various contextual christologies; further inquiry into the relationship between the person and work of Christ, the latter with regard to engaging the various contexts of christological reflection; and further reflection on the connection of Christology to pneumatology and the larger trinitarian question regarding the identity of the Christian God. As with the pneumatology, Kärkkäinen's Christology is published but still very much in via media—there is always more that can and should be said.

Not surprisingly, given the many promissory notes handed on by the *Pneumatology* and *Christology*, Kärkkäinen's *The Doctrine of God* (2004) is the most ambitious and lengthy of the three, focused as it is not only on God the Father, but also on the trinitarian identity of God. As before, however, the goal of *The Doctrine of God* as the culminating volume of the trilogy is to bring the classical theistic tradition into dialogue with its modern/recent challengers.

Again, parts I and II focus on the biblical and historical traditions as internally pluralistic and thematically diverse, yet with a narratival coherence. Parts III and IV elaborate on familiar contemporary European theologians, and on North American theologies in dialogue with the classical tradition (secular/Death-of-God theology, process theology, open theism, and evangelical theology). Parts V and VI explore other more 'contextual' North American options (native American theologies, African American and immigrant theologies, and feminist, womanist, and Latina theologies), and God in 'non-western perspective' (African, Latin American, and Asian theologies). Again, Kärkkäinen is generally sympathetic in his discussion of the thirty plus theologians he describes, even if generalizations are unavoidable, given his attempt to cover as much theological ground as he does in a limited amount of space.

Yet there are also subtle but significant shifts to be observed in *The Doctrine of God*. Here, Kärkkäinen offers more of his own critical perspective, even if such is often disguised as mere commentary. So, while Tillich's theology was highly contextualized to the existentialist ethos of the mid-twentieth century, 'after roughly two decades of unprecedented interest, it did not redeem its promises for continuing movement' (*DG*, 166).[13] Further, the Death-of-God theology—in its more radical form expounded by William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altizer—'could not sustain itself. It was criticized not only by churchgoers and the

**13** Contra Kärkkäinen, however, Tillich scholarship is certainly alive and well in the theological academy.

general public for introducing atheism and paganism into the Christian faith but also by serious theological critics such as Langdon Gilkey for taking the term *God* out of the sphere of Christian theology and Christian tradition' (*DG*, 178).[14] Last (for our purposes) but not least (given space constraints), it is asked if process theology 'has been too contextual in succumbing to the framework of a panentheistic worldview' (*DG*, 185).[15]

*The Doctrine of God* concludes also with suggestions for future research along three lines. First, Kärkkäinen calls for further work on postmodern reactions to the Enlightenment. The limits of western modernism have to be recognized. What comes after modernity, however, is still an open question. Second, the expansion of Christianity in the southern and eastern hemispheres demands theological reconstruction as well. Such work should be dialogical, involving the world church, even if southern and eastern voices are to be privileged initially. The 'exciting developments' in trinitarian theological speculation occurring in these contexts are what fuels, in part, Kärkkäinen's optimism about the future prospects of theology. Finally, the new situation of religious pluralism needs to be grappled with theologically. A greater sensitivity to the issues raised by the diversity of religions can be noted in the *Christology* and even more so in *The Doctrine of God*.

In looking back over the trinitarian trilogy, certain features of Kärkkäinen's theological method highlight its distinctively ecumenical flavour, including its taking seriously Roman Catholic and Orthodox perspectives. As important is the breadth of positions given space and voice in these three textbooks. While one may wonder about why only newer eastern and southern perspectives are labelled as 'contextual', nevertheless Kärkkäinen is to be applauded for taking seriously the emerging 'non-western' voices in the theological conversation. Methodologically, Kärkkäinen is sensitive to the different socio-historical and cultural-religious contexts within which the task of theology is pursued, and hence more open to narrative approaches to the theological task. Theologically, the doctrines of the Spirit, of Christ, and of God are dynamic and 'tangible', being located within particular traditions of discourse and communities of practices. Ethically, Kärkkäinen realizes that the theological reflection has implications for socio-political liberation and for interreligious relationships, among

**14** Again, however, Altizer's theological articulations continue to command attention in the theological academy. For a recent restatement of his position, see T. J. J. Altizer, 'The Primordial, Godhead, and Apocalyptic Christianity', in Amos Yong and Peter G. Heltzel, eds., *Theology in Global Context: Essays in Honor of Robert Cummings Neville* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 265-76; for an assessment of Altizer's recent Christology in comparison with other christologies, see Amos Yong, 'Globalizing Christology: Anglo-American Perspectives in World Religious Context', *Religious Studies Review*, forthcoming.

**15** Interestingly, Kärkkäinen's most critical comments seem directed toward positions commonly classified under the category of theological liberalism, much of which is in its second, third, or even fourth generation. These critical remarks are less noticeable in his discussion of non-western theologies.

other concrete realities.

In contrast to the ecclesiology and the trinitarian trilogy, Kärkkäinen's soteriology, *One with God* (2004), is less a textbook than it is a constructive theological monograph. Kärkkäinen's objective is to develop a doctrine of salvation that bridges not only East and West, but also Catholic and Lutheran emphases in the western church, and toward that end, he suggests that the fusion of the Orthodox doctrine of deification and the Lutheran doctrine of justification can be accomplished through the motif 'union with God'. Distinguishing Luther's own theology of salvation from that of the later Lutheran confessions with the help of the recent Finnish Mannermaa School of Luther research,[16] Kärkkäinen suggests that biblical perspectives on salvation read through the early Luther should be understood not only in terms of forensic justification but also in terms of ontological transformation, not just in terms of a spiritual transaction between God and Christ, but also in terms of human participation in the very life of God.

Defence of this thesis proceeds through an exposition of the idea of justification in recent New Testament scholarship, an elaboration of deification in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, an explication of justification and deification in Luther's theology and later Protestantism (Anabaptism, Methodism, and evangelical theology), and an overview of recent ecumenical conversations on the doctrine of salvation (Lutheran-Orthodox, Roman Catholic-Lutheran, and Orthodox-Pentecostal).

In the final chapter, Kärkkäinen presents a kaleidoscope of supporting perspectives on his soteriological hypothesis. Is not 'union' one of, if not the only, defining motif of eastern and western soteriologies? Does not 'union' allow for the retrieval of fresh biblical imagery and voices? In what ways does the 'union' motif connect justification with sanctification, and recover emphasis on the doctrine of love for the doctrine of salvation? As he weaves his way through these discussions, a substantive pneumatological and trinitarian theology of salvation emerges, recapturing and extending his earlier work in these theological loci. Kärkkäinen concludes by asking about what justification and salvation mean in the wider world context of the third millennium, and how to understand the theological and dialogical implications of deification, justification, and union with God in the Christian encounter with other faiths.

Before we take up in details aspects of this last question in the next section, it would be helpful to provide some summary remarks on Kärkkäinen as an ecumenical theologian. What is most valuable about Kärkkäinen's introductory surveys is their global awareness, a feature practically absent from most evangelical treat-

**16** Tuomo Mannermaa is a Finnish Lutheran theologian who has led this re-reading of Luther's theology; Kärkkäinen cites Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), as a good introduction to the Mannermaa School.

**17** An exception is Aida Besancon Spencer and William David Spencer, eds., *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

ments of these same topics.[17] I gather that this global sensitivity has developed in part not only because of Kärkkäinen's living, working and studying on three continents, but in part also because the Pentecostalism which nurtures his faith, spirituality and piety is now truly a worldwide movement. Thinking theologically as a Pentecostal (in particular) and as a Christian (in general) today requires just this kind of global vision in order that justice can even begin to be done to the topics under consideration. But perhaps more importantly, Kärkkäinen is committed not to any parochial theology, but to the development of Christian theology in its full ecumenical breadth and depth. To be sure, the Pentecostal perspectives informing Kärkkäinen's early work remain with him (as seen in the inclusion of the Pentecostal voice in *One with God*), but the church does not need another theology, Pentecostal or otherwise. Rather, what is needed is a trinitarian theology that is informed by the biblical traditions and by the many Christian perspectives down through the ages and, now, across the world—in short, a 'consensual' and ecumenical theology.[18]

## IV—Kärkkäinen as World Theologian

The development of Kärkkäinen as world theologian derives, in large part, from the work of Kärkkäinen the missiologist. Recall not only his missionary work in Thailand but also that his *habilitationschrift* was a missiology as seen through the Roman-Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue. Since then, Kärkkäinen has taken out membership in the International Association of Mission Studies (2002-present) and the American Missiological Society (2001-present), and continued publishing on theology of mission in various scholarly periodicals, among other forums.[19] Out of this concern for understanding Christian mission, and confronted with the religiously plural context of such mission in the twenty-first century, Kärkkäinen had already begun to take up in the trinitarian trilogy some of the theological questions regarding Christian identity in a religiously plural world and the Christian encounter with other faiths. The *Christology* discussed John Hick's universalist view of Christ, and questions concerning religious pluralism were dealt with across the entirety of *The Doctrine of God*.

In *One with God*, Kärkkäinen queries the theological potential of the 'union with God' motif for interreligious dialogue (*OG*, 133-37). Does such an understanding of salvation provide a bridge for dialogue with traditional African notions of 'vital participation' (or other ideas from the world religions)? Yet Kärkkäinen cautions

**18** Kärkkäinen, 'David's Sling: The Promise and the Problem of Pentecostal Theology Today—A Response to D. Lyle Dabney', *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 23:1 (2001): 147-52, esp. 152.

**19** Kärkkäinen's missiological essays have appeared in such as the *International Review of Mission, Missiology, Asian Journal of Mission, Mission Studies, Missionalia, International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, and *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*.

against a naïve optimism regarding assuming too many commonalities between religious traditions since surface conceptual similarities often reveal radical differences when the deep structure of the traditions are examined. It is precisely because of these differences, however, that 'the common search of humanity to find union with God may teach Christians valuable lessons' (*OG*, 136). In the process, Christians who are made one with God in Christ can manifest to their neighbours in other faiths not only the love of Christ but also, following Luther, even Christ himself.[20] But are there limits to what Christians can learn from those in other faiths? Is there anything genuinely new that can be received from the interreligious encounter that is not already contained within the Christian faith?

It is in part these questions that motivated Kärkkäinen's *Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (2003) and *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* (2004). The former is an introductory text while the latter is more an initial attempt to articulate a constructive Christian theology of religions. The breadth of the *Introduction* is also wide-ranging. Part I presents the 'ambiguity and promise' of the various biblical perspectives on the religions, including the tension between the universalism and the particularism of the gospel message, while part II follows historical developments from the early church through the consolidation of the 'outside the church no salvation' position to the challenges brought by the Enlightenment and our contemporary experience of religious diversity. Part III provides unique perspectives from ecumenical documents revealing how different church traditions have attempted to wrestle with the issues, while part IV presents brief introductions to twenty-one different mostly contemporary theologians of the religions.

For this discussion, Kärkkäinen presents a new typology of theologies of religions: ecclesiocentrism, which limits salvation to Christian faith and emphasizes the importance of missionary proclamation in the encounter with religious others; christocentrism, which has Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical manifestations, and emphasizes salvation as through Christ, even if God may be at work through Christ (anonymously) by the Spirit in the lives of those in other faiths; and theocentrism, which deemphasizes the normativeness and absoluteness of Christ for those in other religious traditions.

As with the other introductory textbooks he has written, Kärkkäinen stays primarily with descriptive exposition and rarely ventures to provide critical commentary in this volume. He does note that John Hick's pluralistic theology of religions, which has generated widespread criticism, ultimately denies the absolutistic and particular truth claims of all the religions, an

**20** See the section in the chapter on Luther titled, 'The Christian as 'Christ' to the Neighbor' (OG, 58-61). I wonder, in light of the parables of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46) and the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), whether or not Christians also encounter Christ in their neighbours of other faiths; for explication of this point, see Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), §6.1.2.

irony which 'works against the pluralistic idea' (*ITR*, 293). But Kärkkäinen does not raise a counter-question to Stanley Samartha's similarly pluralistic claim—that with regard to Buddha, Krishna, Rama, and Christ, 'the theory of multiple *avatara* (Hindu, 'incarnated gods or other significant persons') seems to be theologically the most accommodating attitude in a pluralistic setting, one that permits recognition of both the mystery of God and the freedom of people to respond to divine initiatives in different ways at different times' (*ITR*, 301). The *Introduction* does include a concluding chapter of 'critical reflections and questions' which queries both the effectiveness of the typology and engages in a critical dialogue with the twenty-one theologians of religions. Here, the questions Kärkkäinen poses to Samartha are meta-theological (on the notions of truth and mystery, for example) rather than explicitly theological.

Again, as with his other introductory volumes, Kärkkäinen's tone is conciliatory, and his posture continues to manifest the willingness to learn from his interlocutors, even those who do not adhere to the positions he espouses. The epilogue presents the future tasks for Christian theology of religions: the need for a constructive trinitarian theology of religions; the need for an empirical engagement with the religions as they exist in reality; and the need for common theological projects emergent from extended and sustained interreligious dialogue between representatives of the various faith traditions.

It is to these tasks that Kärkkäinen turns in *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*. In this volume, he focuses on nine theologians (Barth, Rahner, Dupuis, D'Costa, Pannenberg, Pinnock, Hick, Panikkar, and S. Mark Heim, the only one not discussed in the *Introduction*), and provides a case study of the Roman Catholic Church's engagement with Muslims in France. Kärkkäinen's own theological voice sounds forth much more clearly as he engages in an ongoing critical conversation with his dialogue partners, both with regard to biblical interpretation and theological formulation. At one level, this volume represents the culmination of Kärkkäinen's work to date insofar as it brings together his systematic orientation, his trinitarian theological commitments, and his previous work in theology of mission and theology of religions. At another level, however, this book signals the transition of Kärkkäinen as ecumenical theologian to Kärkkäinen as constructive theologian in a world religious context.

This development is most clearly seen in the concluding chapter where a catalog of where we have come from and where we should be headed is presented. In these pages, trinitarian theology is contrasted with the 'normative' pluralism (of Hick and others) insofar as the former provides a basic principle for a theology of religions that preserves the particularity of Christian claims about the Triune God. Further, a trinitarian theology of religions must not separate Christ from Spirit, nor Spirit from the Triune God, nor the church from the Kingdom; there also has to be continuity between the eschatological verification of the truth (here, Kärkkäinen relies on Pannenberg's principle of eschatological verification) and the provisional theological hypotheses that are being

tested. Finally, a trinitarian theology of religions provides an ontological foundation for the one and the many, for communion amidst difference, with the proviso that it affirms only with difficulty Heim's proposal of multiple religious ends.[21]

Kärkkäinen reaffirms his evangelical commitments at the end of *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*:

> Christian trinitarian faith, in my understanding, seeks to find outside the human person the grounds for preferring one narrative over another, that is, in the biblical salvation-history which narrates the history of the triune God in sending the Son in the power of the Spirit to save the world and bring it into an eternal communion. If that is foundationalism, so be it (*TRP*, 183n5).

By this, the traditional Christian principle of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) is acknowledged to be the starting point for Christian theological reflection, even with regard to the diversity of religions. At the same time, Kärkkäinen also insists (rightly, in my estimation) on a scripturally grounded universalism, described by John the Revelator's 'vision of God's people gathered together under one God' (*TRP*, 177).[22]

But aside from this methodological principle and soteriological affirmation, what exactly does Kärkkäinen believe about the religions? With D'Costa (and Barth), but against Hick and Panikkar (and Rahner and Dupuis, depending on how they are interpreted), Kärkkäinen urges that 'other religions are not salvific as such, but other religions are important for the Christian church in that they help the church to penetrate more deeply into the divine mystery' (*TRP*, 179).

The question then becomes: what does it mean to 'penetrate more deeply into the divine mystery'? It appears that it is Christians who gain access to the depths of God precisely through their encounter with other faiths. But if such deeper understanding is not salvific, then what is it? If, according to *One with God*, salvation is participation and union with God, does the interreligious dialogue contribute to such personal and communal transformation? If it does, as the rhetoric of Kärkkäinen seems to imply, then are not other faiths also in some ways conduits of God's gracious and revelatory salvation?

I will return to this matter below. Meanwhile it is important to recognize that while Kärkkäinen does not shrink back from the speculative aspects of Christian theology of religions, his motivation from the beginning has been more missiological and concerned with Christian self-understanding. In other words, Christian reflection on the religions enables a more self-critical promulgation of the Christian mission and encourages a more dialogical approach to other faiths even as it helps Christians to understand themselves and the diversity of religions within the providential plan of God as enacted in history. In the process of grappling with these matters, Kärkkäi-

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**21** As developed in S. Mark Heim, *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

**22** See also TRP, 146, where this eschatological vision is reiterated against Heim's proposal of multiple religious ends.

nen has come to recognize that religious diversity poses challenging questions to Christian theology today. Inevitably, by taking up these questions Kärkkäinen the evangelical and ecumenical theologian has become Kärkkäinen the world theologian and theologian of the world religions.

## V—Critical Questions for Kärkkäinen

I have two sets of critical questions for Kärkkäinen, one concerning his work as an ecumenical theologian and the other concerning his work as a theologian of the religions. We will take these in order before returning in the last section to the questions relating Kärkkäinen the evangelical theologian to the present and future of evangelical theology.

My first set of questions to Kärkkäinen concerns the overall methodology which underlies his ecumenical theology. In brief, this set of questions can be explicated in terms of three other interrelated questions: 1) Is not all theology contextual? 2) Is not the contextual character of any theology informed, at least in part, both by the questions that it grapples with and by the practices that give it shape? 3) In what ways is Kärkkäinen's own ecumenical theology in this sense contextual, and how can it best proceed as both contextual and ecumenical at the same time? Let me elaborate briefly on each of these questions in order.

First, the question regarding the contextual character of all theology emerges in large part out of Kärkkäinen's own theological categorization. Each volume of the trinitarian trilogy has a 'contextual' section which refers to recently emergent non-western theologies that 'correct and complement the mainly Western approach that has dominated' (P, 147). In *Christology* and *The Doctrine of God*, Kärkkäinen acknowledges that this does not mean western theologies are not similarly contextual since no theology is 'immune to surrounding philosophical, religious, social, and political influences' (C, 188); yet the designation 'contextual' remains useful and relevant to the extent to which any theology is 'firmly anchored in a specific context, be it cultural, intellectual, or related to a specific worldview' (C, 188), and to the extent to which 'theologians *acknowledge* theologies to be contextually shaped' (DG, 199; emphasis original).

Any theologian has the prerogative to define his own terms. But what is it that contextualizes any theology? This is a complex question to which no simple answer will suffice. For our purposes, I suggest that a theology is contextually shaped by two interrelated factors: its historical practices and its socio-cultural situatedness. By this, I mean that any theology attempts to provide a coherent explanation that makes sense of its practices within the broader social, cultural, religious, and intellectual world. After Tillich, who urged that theology arises in the response of revelation to the questions of the situation, there should be no confusion that what I am calling 'socio-cultural situatedness' refers precisely to the contemporary world in all its complexity. But the other half of my claim regarding the contextuality of all theology requires further explication.

Following the work of Reinhard

Hütter and others, I suggest that theology (Christian belief) is (or should be) shaped as much by the practices of the church as by Scripture or tradition.[23] This is not to deny that Scripture and tradition have played and continue to play important roles in theological reflection. Rather, it is to say that Scripture and tradition are themselves constituted by the practices of the church, among other things. And what are these ecclesial practices? These would be the congregational liturgies (both structured and unstructured), the devotional life, the symbolic enactments, the economic habits, the political stances, the institutional interactivities, the social organizations and networks, and other concrete manifestations of Christian communities and the individuals that inhabit them.

From this perspective, for example, the Christian claim about Jesus Christ as Lord and as God (and, by extension, claims regarding trinitarian faith) is intricately tied up with the church's adoration and worship of Jesus; or the Christian understanding of the Eucharist is inextricably connected with the realization of the presence of Jesus around the communal table; or the Christian doctrine of the church is deeply intertwined with the inter-relationship between the church's political identity and its social practices; or the Christian doctrine of salvation is dependent on which of the biblical metaphors resonate most deeply with the experiences and practices of the church in the various socio-historical contexts within which it exists, etc. (e.g., *OG*, 131-33). Again, this is not to deny that the Bible is normative and authoritative for shaping Christian practice, but it is to say that the relationship between scripture and practice is much more complicated than any one-way articulation of such relationship.

For our purposes, the preceding remarks raise the following methodological question about Kärkkäinen's ecumenical theology: insofar as all theology is contextual and thereby informed by the practices of the church (considered both diachronically across the centuries and synchronically around the world today), can Kärkkäinen's ecumenical theology succeed without taking into account the diversity of practices which inform the plurality of voices and perspectives that he has attempted so valiantly to preserve? Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology gives us windows into how the practices of the church contribute to constituting the ecclesiological traditions. But the books published after the ecclesiology are not as helpful in identifying how ecclesial practices shape and inform the teachings of the church(es) and her theologians.

In the Introduction to *Theology of Religions*, Kärkkäinen does draw from 'official church documents and confessional pronouncements' (*ITR*, 110), but he does not say much about how the liturgical practices of the Latin Church undergird its 'no salvation outside the church' stance; or how the sectarian practices of the Free Churches have shaped their more exclusivistic

23 See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); cf. also Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

perspectives; or how the socio-political practices of the mainline Protestant denominations have similarly shaped the more inclusive attitudes of the ecumenical movement, etc. Granted, Kärkkäinen's intention was to write introductory textbooks about the church's beliefs, not social histories about the church's practices, so we should not be too hard on him for not doing what he never set out to accomplish.[24]

But the question remains: how viable is an ecumenical theology abstracted from the practices that sustain the beliefs and confessions of the church in all her diversity? In fact, let me put the matter even more strongly: an ecumenical theology is possible only in abstraction; often what continues to divide churches are the practices that inform the diversity of theologies at the ecumenical roundtable. This was seen in the processes leading up to and following the release and discussion of the ecumenical document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*,[25] and remains especially problematic when the very different practices of churches in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere are factored into the ecumenical conversation. At the end of the day, how is an ecumenical theology even possible, given the radical differences that characterize the practices of the churches around the world?

Here is where I wish to present Kärkkäinen with a suggestion. Rather than attempting to develop an ecumenical theology in the abstract, why not acknowledge that there is no ahistorical ecumenical theology possible, and to work toward an ecumenical theology in confessional perspective? What about acknowledging that theological consensus cannot be achieved through abstract reflection alone, but that a truly ecumenical theology must be informed not only by the diversity of perspectives but also by a diversity of practices? If the 'tongues of Pentecost' reflect an ecumenical harmony of different voices declaring the wonders of God (Acts 2:11b),[26] then so also will the diversity of confessions reflect an ecumenical theology of different perspectives into the truth of God.

In this case, Kärkkäinen's own Pentecostal *habitus* does not inhibit the ecumenical potential of his theological vision. On the contrary, precisely because his Pentecostal perspective is rooted in the practices of his churches, the Pentecostal contribution is essential rather than marginal to the devel-

**24** Yet at one point in his discussion of Pannenberg's theology of religions, Kärkkäinen wonders if the result is a viewpoint that is 'one-sidedly rational' (TRP, 93). His question is motivated by what he takes to be the absence of doxology in Pannenberg's quest for truth in the interreligious arena. As such, Kärkkäinen seems to recognize the inseparability of the church's practices from her beliefs.

**25** See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), and, for commentary, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Initial Reactions from Roman Catholic Dioceses in the United States* (N.p.: National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers, 1986).

**26** I argue this point at length in my '"As the Spirit Gives Utterance…": Pentecost, Intra-Christian Ecumenism, and the Wider *Oekumene*', *International Review of Mission* 92:366 (July 2003): 299-314.

opment of a fully ecumenical theology. This was most clearly seen both in his ecclesiology and in his 'decision' to begin his trinitarian trilogy with pneumatology rather than with the theology proper. The pneumatology was launched first because of the pneumatological orientation nurtured by the Pentecostal tradition, while the ecclesiology, as we saw earlier (III), was shot through with pneumatological motifs and emphases.

In fact, as I suggested then, the strength of the ecclesiology was not only in its comprehensiveness (essential for an introductory textbook), but also in its suggestiveness for a systematic reconstruction of the doctrine of the church in pneumatological perspective (a pneumatological or Spirit-ecclesiology). In short, I am simply urging Kärkkäinen to return to and retrieve some of the Pentecostal trajectories articulated earlier in his theological career (e.g., *TPT*, part I) both to provide more concrete grounding for his ecumenical theology, and to reinvigorate the constructive dimension of his future theological work.

This brings me to the second set of questions I have, this time for Kärkkäinen as (an emerging) world theologian. This set of questions can also be explicated in terms of three interrelated questions: 1) what is needed to more fully unfold Kärkkäinen's nascent trinitarian theology of religions? 2) How does the fact that other religious traditions are similarly constituted by practices provide challenges for contemporary Christian theology of religions? 3) W(h)ither Kärkkäinen as a theologian of world religions in light of these challenges? Again, I address each briefly in order.

First, Kärkkäinen acknowledges at the end of *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* that he has only taken some first steps toward developing a more comprehensive trinitarian theology of religions. One of the important principles suggested in that last chapter, however, was to think of the relationship between Christianity and other religions as a kind of unity-in-diversity mirroring the triune communion. In this framework, the Trinity is the structuring principle for Christian faith even as it also 'pushes Christians to dialogue with other religions' (*TRP*, 163). Yet Kärkkäinen also realizes that this is an idealized model which calls for testing through engagement with the empirical religions.

If/when Kärkkäinen moves from ecumenical dialogue to actual interreligious dialogue and from ecumenical theology to a theology informed by the interfaith conversation, he may find himself stretched in one of three direction: a) toward Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which threatens to collapse the differences between religions; b) toward Heim's trinitarian theology of religious ends, which threatens to collapse the unity-in-duality of eschatological scenarios deeply embedded in the theological tradition; or c) toward a kind of Hegelian synthesis (syncretism!), which (evangelical) theologians are rightly concerned about. This is because trinitarian theological reflection, sundered from the practices which nurture it, leads to abstract pronunciations regarding the religions similarly sundered from the practices which nurture these other faiths. The interfaith encounter adds increasing levels of theoretical and practical depth that illuminate our

basic understanding of other religious traditions, and in that sense, prolonged engagement with the interreligious dialogue will challenge our more abstractly formulated theologies of religions.

What I am saying here, of course, is that other faiths are constituted similarly by a complex web of practices—of liturgies, devotional life, symbols, institutions, commentarial activity, social configurations, economic habits, political stances, etc.—which inform their beliefs and doctrines.[27] Thus, one cannot sustain a theology of religions apart from the religions themselves. In other words, any worthwhile Christian theology of religions will eventually need to deal concretely with the actual beliefs and practices which constitute the world of the religions (just as any theology of science will need to deal with the actual sciences or any theology of culture will need to deal with actual cultures). When this happens, however, the complexity of the truth question thrown up by the plurality of religions is further exacerbated. Kärkkäinen rightly wishes, following Pannenberg and others, not to discard the question of truth amidst the plurality of religious claims. How to adjudicate these matters in the framework of *fides quaerens intellectum* is one of the foremost challenges for Christian theology in the twenty-first century.

This difficulty can be seen especially in light of the connection between religious beliefs and practices. Christian theological propositions—e.g., about the Trinity and the incarnation—make little sense outside of the larger narrative and practices from which they emerge. Similarly, the truth claims of other faiths are embedded in their narratives (worldviews) and practices (rituals, etc.). The problem is that truth claims are propositionally formulated, yet their nestedness within wider ways of life and thinking means that theology of religions has to go beyond, beneath, or behind the doctrinal claims of the religions in order to assess their truthfulness. But to do so requires that one enter into that other way of life, so to speak, in order for the sensibility of such claims to emerge within a participatory framework.

How can Christian theologians engage in that kind of interreligious encounter without compromising their distinctive religious commitments? Are Christian theologians only limited to inviting their dialogue partners from other faiths to enter into the Christian way of life and 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps. 34:8), but prohibited from accepting the invitation from their dialogue partners to enter into and experience these other religious ways of life? And if Christian theologians do proceed in the latter direction, do we lapse into a kind of fideism amidst the multiplicity of truth claims in the world of religions?[28]

**27** As argued forcefully by George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

**28** I expand on these matters elsewhere—e.g., Yong, 'The "Baptist Vision" of James William McClendon, Jr.: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Response', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37:2 (2002): 32-57, and 'The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth and the Religions', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57:1 (2004): 1-25.

My response is that theology has always been an ongoing dialogue between the biblical/theological traditions and the contemporary situation. In the case of theology of religions, the dialogue must now be extended to engage the beliefs and practices of religious others. Hence the importance of further refining the discipline of comparative theology for any Christian theology desiring to take into account the world context. The key to a comparative theology is its dialogical and intersubjective character. Theological and doctrinal statements are compared at various levels, only through a sustained process of dialogue allowing a much deeper sense of familiarity to emerge among the dialogue partners about the wider framework of ideas (worldviews) and practices within with fundamental religious beliefs are embedded.[29] I suggest that this kind of intersubjectively engaged project in comparative theology is necessary if we want to really honour the beliefs and practices of religious others, if we wish to remain vulnerable to transformative learning, and if we have an authentically eschatological horizon that frames our quest for theological truth.[30]

Against this backdrop, w(h)ither Kärkkäinen as a world theologian? Two paths forward suggest themselves. On the one hand, Kärkkäinen could continue in his attempt to develop a Christian theology of other religions for Christians. This would not require that he 'get his hands' (too) dirty with actual engagement with those in other faiths. Technically, this move would also limit Kärkkäinen to being a theologian of world Christianity, thus withering his prospects as a world theologian and a theologian of the world religions. Of course, such work—theology by the church and for the church—is necessarily, but it is also in some significant senses preliminary to the quest for truth that animates the theological quest.

On the other hand, Kärkkäinen could continue his project as a world Christian theologian by engaging with any and all who are interested in the subject matter of theology, including representatives from other faith traditions. This would lead to the kind of intersubjective mode of comparative theology sketched earlier. This move will, of course, allow the project of Kärkkäinen as world theologian to come to fruition, and that precisely because it propels Christian faith seeking understanding to pursue the theological truth question to the ends of the earth.

At this point in Kärkkäinen's theological career, then, my two suggestions are, seemingly, in contrary directions. On the one hand, I have encouraged Kärkkäinen to return to his Pentecostal roots, not merely to retrieve a sectarian theological identity (although in certain contexts needing the prophetic truth of the gospel, such

**29** For an example of such a venture in comparative theology, see the three volumes of The Comparative Religious Ideas Project: Robert Cummings Neville and Wesley J. Wildman, eds., *Ultimate Religious, The Human Condition*, and *Religious Truth* (all published by Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

**30** I defend this proposal at much greater length in the concluding chapter of my *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), ch. 7.

a sectarian identity is essential), but also to provide a confessional ground for the particularity of claims which constitute any constructive ecumenical theology. On the other hand, I have also encouraged Kärkkäinen to engage in the interreligious dialogue, not only to further establish his identity as a world theologian, but also because Christian faith presumes a universality to the gospel that cannot (and should not) back down in the face of alternative claims to truth.

How to reconcile these two? Perhaps no simplistic reconciliation is possible on this side of the *eschaton*, as theologians are called to live with both the particularity and the universality of the gospel message. Yet in the hands of good theologians, such a tension is not disabling, but rather provides the resources out of which truth is discerned. Kärkkäinen is such a theologian, and I am convinced his celebrating and inhabiting his Pentecostal habitus more fully will only stimulate his ecumenical theological program even as it will further ground his comparative theological engagement with the interreligious dialogue.

## VI—W(h)ither Evangelical Theology?

While Kärkkäinen is really still only a mid-career theologian with his magnum opus far ahead of him, I have nevertheless been already sufficiently encouraged and challenged by his work to ask about the question concerning the direction that evangelical theology needs to take in the twenty-first century. Allow me to approach this question from three directions: the sociological, the methodological, and the theological. The following remarks are necessarily tentative, attempting to discern the most promising directions for the future of evangelical theology in light of Kärkkäinen's work to date.

From a sociological perspective, the identity of evangelicalism and of evangelical theology is seriously contested. The fundamentalist-evangelical divide has now proliferated into a spectrum that includes neo-evangelicals, post-conservative evangelicals, Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicals, ecumenical evangelicals, mainline evangelicals, and Pentecostals and charismatics, among other groups and movements. At this level, evangelicalism is too fragmented, and historians will debate endlessly the genealogies of the 'authentic' evangelicalism. Part of the problem is that each of these evangelical identities has been forged in different contexts, protesting different matters.

Yet it is also precisely this situation which illuminates for us the value of Kärkkäinen's work, especially the trinitarian trilogy and the textbook on ecclesiology. The ecumenical trajectory of these volumes provides us with one example of how to engage with difference: that of understanding it sufficiently so as to be able to describe it on its own terms. Critical engagement cannot proceed through straw-positions. Kärkkäinen's ecumenical approach to theology is suggestive for the future of evangelical theology precisely because it protests both against a sectarianism which refuses to take the contemporary context seriously, and against a liberal relativism which refuses to take the question of theo-

logical truth seriously.

This raises, of course, the methodological question for evangelical theology. Evangelicals have come to understand the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation not as a literal guideline that limits the sources for theological reflection, but as pointing to the recognition of scripture as authoritative norm for theology.[31] Yet what does this mean and how is this enacted in the practicing of theological reflection? Does scripture shape theology with its propositions (a la Carl Henry and others) or with its narrative (a la Gabriel Fackre and others)? Alternatively, is the normativeness of scripture connected with the trinitarian shape of the gospel and the narrative of the Father sending the Son by the power of the Spirit?[32]

I do not intend to address these issues comprehensively. But it is precisely evangelical disputes about theological method that force this question. I suggest, again, that Kärkkäinen's work proposes one way forward for evangelical theological method. We need a spectrum of approaches: biblical, historical, ecumenical, philosophical, cross-cultural, etc. It is also just as important that both ends of any spectrum are necessary for us to chart an evangelical middle ground. More conservative positions are reminders of the importance of past insights, even while more progressive alternatives would help us explore the acceptable limits of Christian theological discourse. Kärkkäinen's articulation of the pluralism of biblical data on any doctrine also helps us to see the perspectival nature of religious knowing that enriches rather than relativizes the theological task. Hence the diversity of Christian theologies provides a wealth of resources for evangelical theology in our time so long as, following Kärkkäinen's lead, we adhere to the authority of the scriptural norm, follow closely the consensus gained by the tradition, and engage new ideas and issues with careful discernment. The perennial challenge will be to articulate the unity of the faith in terms of its diversity. Embracing this challenge will invigorate evangelical theology, not to mention ecumenical theology and world theology.

Am I therefore suggesting that any evangelical theology must also be ecumenical and global? At one level, I am actually saying that any evangelical theology, concerned as it is with the relevance of the gospel message for the whole world, cannot but be ecumenical and global in its horizons. Further, from the pietist perspective, which informs Kärkkäinen's (and my own) Pentecostal tradition, to ask about the meaning of Jesus is to ask about the meaning of Jesus for us. Hence, what would Jesus mean to Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, among others? To ask the question about how

**31** For evangelical reconstructions of the doctrine of scripture, I have found most helpful William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

**32** One example of such a construal of biblical normativity in terms of the gospel narrative is seen in the Reformed theologian, Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

theology today comprehends the identity of Jesus and the meaning of salvation as formulated through the ecumenical conversation (as Kärkkäinen did in *One with God*) leads to asking the related question about how a world theology might understand the identity of Jesus and the meaning of salvation as formulated through the interreligious encounter. In this case, does Kärkkäinen's *oeuvre* to date chart one way forward for evangelical theology as we anticipate the next few years and decades?

I therefore suggest that an authentically biblical, ecumenical, and world theology will be an evangelical theology. Put in other terms, an evangelical theology today will be faithful to the biblical narrative, will be ecumenical in scope according both to Jesus' prayer for the unity of the church and to St. Paul's metaphor about the church being one body constituted by many members, and will anticipate the possibility of the Spirit's speaking through any language, tribe, nation, and even religious tradition, even as this happened on the Day of Pentecost. I have presented Kärkkäinen as modelling one way forward for evangelical theology. Readers who have persevered through this essay should now turn to Kärkkäinen himself for the details of such a vision for evangelical theology in the twenty-first century.[33]

**33** My thanks to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen for looking over Sections II-IV to ensure that I have not misrepresented his work; yet I take full responsibility for the ideas in these pages.

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# Toward an Ethic of Shared Responsibility in Galatians 5:13-15

Peter Mageto

**KEYWORDS:** *Freedom, love, individual, community, service, legalism, unity, Spirit, mission*

## Introduction

MOST scholars agree that Paul wrote to the Galatians in response to a severe crisis that was likely to cause disunity among Christians.[1] Some scholars, depending on chapters 1 and 2, argue that Paul develops a defence for his apostleship, though Bernard Brinsmead reminds us that 'the charge concerning apostleship is one of dependence on Jerusalem, not independence'[2] (cf. 1:11-12, 17-19). On authorship, there is clear textual evidence that Paul himself wrote the letter (1:1, 13-16: 2:1-14: 4:12-20). In many ways, the epistle is a unity, and this unity of diverse elements (history, theology and ethics) is one of its most characteristic and important features.[3]

In Galatians 5:1 Paul shows that freedom from the law is necessary. He urges the Galatians to remain constantly in that freedom by not embracing the new law which the opponents are urging them to do because they will

1 Frank Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 3; the agitators were Christians from Judea who advocated for circumcision. cf. Robert Jewett, 'The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation', *NTS* 17 (1970) p. 207.

2 Bernard H. Brinsmead, *Galatians: Dialogical Response to Opponents* (California: Scholars Press, 1982), p.15. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 5, who argues that Galatians 1 and 2 introduce Paul's theological argument.

3 C.K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation: A study of the Epistle of Galatians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 9-11.

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be moving to a new yoke of slavery.[4] In this section of Galatians, we begin to sense the tension between law and Spirit, command and inward motivation, individual and community.[5] He contends that reverting to the age of the law is going back to slavery—no one can be in both ages at the same time. No wonder Paul decided to issue a series of advisory and hortatory statements here.

## Freedom from and to Service: Individual and Community

In Chapters 5 and 6, Paul has worked out his theological presentation so that a redefinition of covenant fidelity in terms of the faithfulness of Christ serves as a Christological basis for his ethic. The dispute in Galatia was not simply about ethnic identity marks, but about how life was to be regulated on a daily basis. On that score, the agitators upheld the law as the means by which behaviour was to be governed and managed. Accordingly, without Paul's presentation of chapters 5 and 6, his explanation of the gospel in chapters 1 to 3, related as it is to the Galatian crisis, would have been incomplete. Therefore, Paul's use of the motif of the faithfulness of Christ in 2:20 opens the way to his discussion of a Christian ethic of shared responsibility in chapters 5 and 6.[6] Accepting Jesus Christ by faith moves individual members from their slavery to the elements of the world and the imposition of the law into a state of freedom and service within the new community of faith. Consequently, freedom for Christians becomes in essence a responsibility of service within the new community of faith.

In chapters 5 and 6, Paul speaks to the community that bears Christ's form and is led by Christ's Spirit. His address presupposes the presence of Christ and the constant activity of Christ's Spirit. He describes the essence of corporate patterns of life that constitute God's continuing apocalyptic rectification (meaning divine action that rectifies or justifies humanity) which is explained in this letter by reference to the way God was reaching out through Jesus Christ, even to the Gentiles, by conquering the cosmic elements and powers which had enslaved them. The corporate patterns describe what the church has been called to do, not by being a new community of faith, but because the church is fully equipped by the Holy Spirit to bear

**4** Matera, *Galatians*, p. 180. Cf. Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 69, where he argues that Paul dissuades the Galatians from a course they had their desires awakened to pursue.

**5** Peter Richardson, *Paul's Ethic of Freedom* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), p. 80.

**6** Bruce W. Longenecker, 'Defining the Faithful Character of the Covenant Community: Gal. 2:15-21 and Beyond' in James D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 88-89. Cf. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 254-255, where he provides a sub-division of chapter 5 and 6 into three sections, all of which serve as a restatement of the 'indicative' of salvation (5:1-12; 5:13-24; 5:25-6:6:10), and concludes with an eschatological warning (6:7-10).

fruit.[7] Therefore, as the corporate patterns of the new community of faith are meaningful, the members in this community have to understand their freedom and its application in service to others. The community founded in the name of Jesus Christ is to be of service to the broader community, serving as an agent of transformation.

Paul makes a passionate appeal to the Christians in Galatia to embrace an ethic of shared responsibility so as not to abuse their new-found freedom and fall prey to the traps their opponents were setting before them. He challenges Christians to evaluate and understand the basis of their freedom. Consequently, Paul reminds the Christians not to fear embracing social responsibilities that come with Christian freedom. In other words, Christians must be ready to utilize effectively numerous opportunities God makes available as we seek ways and means to reach the world with the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul urges Christians to embrace a reach-out service founded on the holistic ministry of Jesus Christ.

In embracing Christian freedom made manifest in Christian service to others, we acknowledge that our 'obedience and ethical behaviour found in the relationship with God and the motivating power of the Holy Spirit'[8] strengthen us to serve others in *agape* love. In other words, as Christians, we do not depend on ourselves to serve others, but Jesus Christ is the true example of our true freedom[9] that leads to effective service in the world. Therefore, when we serve our neighbours, we derive our actions from the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the fact that sin separates human beings from God, as God sends us back to the world to reach others for his kingdom, we are reminded to love them as God's creatures, and treat them as potential candidates for freedom from sin, made possible in God's grace. Any Christian service toward our neighbours is only a sign of what Christian faith is all about in truly serving God and humanity.

The ethic of shared responsibility is well articulated for all believers as members of the new creation in 5:22-23. The ethic of shared responsibility is made possible through the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul was concerned that Christians may abandon the true gospel of freedom and go back to embrace the old yoke of *stoicheia* (elements of the world as found in 4:8-11). The life controlled by the fruit of the Spirit will in turn bear fruit in the lives of those that we serve. In this context then, Christians are urged to utilize their Christian freedom to establish meaningful and lasting relationships that will enhance the gospel in the world. Consequently, we can take Paul's challenge in Galatians to underscore the conviction that sin causes conflict, while the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ provides freedom from sin to all those who believe and

**7** Cf. J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), pp. 233-4.

**8** Richardson, *Paul's Ethic of Freedom*, p. 82.

**9** Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 43.

obey, to follow Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

Paul's concern is broader than we might think, as it is not just about condemnation, but salvation that leads to greater light and not just a mere play-out of becoming a believer today and backsliding to sinful practices tomorrow. As the Christians in Galatia were challenged by Paul to operate on a different realm controlled by the Holy Spirit, so we are reminded as Christians today that a new life lived under the control of the Spirit is sufficient and can impact more lives as we reach the world. Therefore, Christian freedom working through love in the world is the content of the new creation, not as man's achievement, but God's gift.[10]

Paul's challenge to the Christians in Galatia is well summed up in 5:14b: 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself', which at the end will serve as a basis for that freedom. It is becoming clear that for Paul, freedom in God means finding the ability to mature into the personhood each one of us was created to be; it means a growing realization of those qualities of life that bring us to full participation in God's plan that has been made known to us through the love of Jesus Christ. It is from the mystery of God's love for us that we move to the life of love, which is given by God and to our fellow men. In reducing the Mosaic law to the love command (cf. Lev. 19:18) Paul alludes to Jesus' summary statement of the Torah as recorded in the synoptic gospels (cf. Mk. 12:33; Matt. 22:39; Lk. 10: 27; cf. with Romans 13:8-10). In this, the law of Christ is the fulfilment of the new covenant with its accompanying eschatological law.[11]

It is true that our service will be real service if something essential takes place for others through what we will and do in our turning to them. The same God who alone is good makes us responsible, even as those who are not good, to be available to him and therefore to our neighbours. In other words, the wound with which our neighbour comes to each one of us shows that we should serve our neighbours without reservation. The neighbour needs our unconditional service and, where possible, our presence. Therefore, Paul urges the Galatian Christians to 'lead a life in accordance with the Spirit, because such a life is *de facto* the fulfilment of the Torah.'[12]

We do not serve our neighbours when we use our encounter with them to draw attention to ourselves. In this way, in the case of very many supposed works of care and charity, we have to

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**10** Barrtett, *Freedom and Obligation*, pp. 59-63.

**11** C. Marvin Pate, *The Reverse of the Curse: Paul, Wisdom and the Law* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 2000), p. 205. Cf. Matera, *Galatians*, pp. 196-197, where he asserts that love satisfies the requirements of the law because it is a gift of the Spirit, accomplished in Christ. Therefore the law is fulfilled through love.

**12** Betz, *Galatians*, pp. 275-276. Cf. Pate, *The Reverse of the Curse*, p. 210 argues that since the law is indivisible and binding on Jew and Gentile alike, one must keep it in entirety to be justified by God, or, preferably, one can trust in Christ, who fulfilled and terminated the law. This concept is still lacking in many Christian teachings, as some think that Paul wholly condemned the law in upholding justification by faith.

ask ourselves whether ultimately the individuals concerned, or the relevant society, church or community, or the state in general, are not simply putting on an act to show and prove their worth. The challenge is to develop human willingness to do one thing: to be available to one another in the true Christian sense, that we reckon ourselves as God's, and that we forgive one another for our sins. Paul certainly emphasizes the fact that no more and no less is required of us than to be Christ's ambassadors to each other.

The challenge that Paul is setting before the Galatians is to evaluate the essence of *agape* love that has been made manifest by Jesus Christ himself. This love has to be experienced in a corporate context. Individualizing this love is only destroying that community of faith that Paul intended to establish. Genuine love in which the whole law is fulfilled creates true community; community enhances it. Thus,

> the power of the new age is love—not just love in general, but God's love, the love through which God has created all that is, in which God wills that it be sustained, and by which God acts to redeem it. For Paul the decisive event of God's love is Christ's death.[13]

We encounter neighbours with our whole attitude as people whom God truly counts to be God's, just as God counts us to be his. God's love is visible, not just because of retelling the story of Jesus, but also through the ongoing life of the community of faith, the church.[14] This love provides a distinction between

> the religious and the irreligious, between the covenanted and the un-covenanted that is abolished in Christ. Abraham is the ancestor of all believers, of the Jew who sees through the precepts of Torah to its real requirement of faith rather than works, and sees that faith directed towards Christ, and of the Gentile who has the work of the law written in his heart and trusts Christ, knowing that he has no religious works to offer.[15]

## Toward an Ethic of Shared Responsibility: A Model for Christian Unity

People outside the church have tended to criticize Christians for their legalistic tendencies, though in most cases Christians tend to ignore that criticism. This criticism shows up our lack of concern for others and insensitivity to the effect of our legalism on others. The kind of Christianity that has been planted in many mission fields tends to appeal to legalistic tendencies, thus becoming condemnatory rather than forgiving. I see in Paul's writing to the Galatians a flexibility that opens up an alternative, one that can be linked with the operative principle of agape love, derived from God in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the power of the Spirit,

**13** Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 26.

**14** Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 375.

**15** Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 37.

keeping always in the path of the true gospel. Because of its ethical tradition and insight and anticipation, the Christian community should be especially open to opportunities for fulfilment and especially sensitive to forces which frustrate it.

The church has found itself at a crossroads. It is faced with divisive dilemmas in cases of divorce, homosexuality, circumcision (especially in African countries), ordination of women, and in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It is Paul's message that local congregations should form the ground on which the right teaching is to be done so that members can do away with their pride cherished in works that usually undermine the unity of the church. 'Anything that does not work itself out in love, though it may conceivably be verbal orthodoxy, is not faith in Paul's sense of the term.'[16] God is active in the world as well as in the church. He does not intend a different kind of wholeness for the church from that which he desires for the world.

Therefore, Christian freedom enables us to enter into meaningful relationships with other persons and to find the fulfilment of our own lives in God as we live for him and for others, since a Christian is one who is free to care for others. If we are to understand that service to the neighbour is required as part of our faithful Christian living then concern for the effects of sin should motivate us to reach our God-given neighbours in love and service as made manifest in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. To serve humanity with a Christian eye is not just to want to live together in unity, but to take into account what Christ has done to redeem humanity. We are Christ's ambassadors in declaring Christian freedom in our world today.

The way Paul deals with the identity marks that his agitators were urging the Galatians to accept, as well as his challenge to the Galatians to serve one another, is the church's challenge today in seeking unity. Sin affects the transformation that the church proclaims and it deforms the law, making others turn law into legalism by using it as a stepladder to ascend to God's level. We have a true example in Paul in his dealing with the agitators who were urging the Galatian Christians to accept unnecessary identity marks. The church's challenge today is to witness truly for Christ by declaring null all the identity marks that society and the world have accepted as standards for humanity. The church's challenge is to acknowledge truly the principalities and powers of darkness in the world as they obstruct access to the true transformation that Jesus offers to all those who believe and trust in him. Any identity marks that are enhanced by rigid political or cultural legalism only enslave all those who are not willing to surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of their lives. True Christian freedom is what Jesus provides by setting us free from any legalistic tendencies that dehumanise rather than liberate.[17]

Emphasis on the church as a body or

**16** Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 71.

**17** Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 62.

community is an essential factor that minimizes the individual and maximizes corporate reality. For Paul, to be in freedom is to be in service to and for others. Freedom is the well-being of the community that is founded on *agape* love and perfected in serving one another. The church, as a community of faith, is where all members are valued and their individual contributions are respected. In other words, freedom is more than asking for equality, human rights, and justice or to be in solidarity with the oppressed and suffering. Freedom should be understood through the faithfulness and love of Jesus Christ

Love as service introduces a dimension which is not found in mutual love: the element of self-giving. The sacrificial love of Christ remains the paradigm for our Christian service to the world, without denying the value of that love which we experience in Christian fellowship. Love is mutual sharing, mutual support, binding the human community together in special ways. In other words, the Christian marks of baptism, confirmation, Holy Communion, speaking in tongues or leadership should not enslave the body of Christ. When these marks become barriers to others, then Christians slide back to become legalists.

It is indeed clear that Paul grounds the community's life in the Spirit. For Paul, 'participation in the crucifixion of Christ is the sole condition for ongoing life in the Spirit'.[18] In other words, Paul sets a clear picture for the church today whereby Christians are persuaded as a community of Christ to remember and return to the life in Christ. The great warning that Paul extended to the Galatians can be extended to the church today, that our understanding of the life in the Spirit should not be distorted by thinking that we are free from ethical responsibility. Rather we should come to terms with the fact that the new life in the Spirit is a life in which Christians are called to an ethic of shared responsibility as Paul says, to 'bear one another's burdens' (6:2). However, we have to ensure that the call of forbearance does not lead the church to 'grow weary in doing what is right' (6:9a). Therefore, in the context of Paul's ethic of shared responsibility, by Christian living and walking in the Spirit, the church is mutually determined. Living by the Spirit is the motive and power of walking in accordance with the Spirit's leadership. Walking in accord with the Spirit leads believers to the place where the life of the Spirit upholds those under assault.[19]

In discovering love of one another, the true image of God is brought to us. There is no way an individual believer can journey alone. The community is very important. It is absurd that the church of Christ in the world has been divided for ages on doctrinal issues, some of which arise from a misrepresentation of Paul's teaching. The denominational demarcations (established by missionaries under colonialism in line with the spheres of influence in third world countries), racial

**18** Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988), p. 172.

**19** Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit*, p. 194.

divisions, class, gender, ecclesiastical privileges, economics and politics remain a challenge to the church today. In order to overcome these kinds of barriers so that Christians of all ages and gender attain their true freedom in Christ and are of great service to the world, the church must be the church and be transformed in Jesus Christ so as to become 'a sign of God's eschatological reconciliation of the world'.[20]

The local congregation should be a community characterized in its life, mission and worship by inclusiveness and advocacy for the rights of others. The congregation in its contextual challenges has to underline the reconciling work of Christ, who has broken down the barriers of ethnic identity marks, racism and many other barriers by creating a new people in the Spirit. In this way, the local congregation will champion the true freedom and *agape* love in proclamation, and by deeds in Jesus Christ in whom 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). At heart the Christian church is to be a welcoming and open community to all those who are powerless and helpless, by unmasking the dehumanizing powers often inherent in serving others.

This ethic of shared responsibility must stem from our theological institutions. Most of the seminaries give an impression of being remnants of the monasteries of the middle ages, living far away from the real issues of life. Our seminaries must reformulate their programs to enable the church to become a community immersed in history, living perpetually in action and reaction with the society in which it finds itself. The freedom of faith must not be destroyed by legalism but has to be enhanced through service to others. The church has to remain the conscience and the servant within the human society. It is only by discerning when and where and how God is revealed and manifested in the early church that we will come to terms with what God wants the church to do today. The option for all Christians is to demand that we review in critical terms the history to which we belong. This faith gives rise to spiritual experiences that urge many Christians to labour for forgiveness, reconciliation and love across the inherited boundaries of religion, ethnicity, culture and sexuality in yearning for a world reconciled in love and justice.

Paul's ethic of shared responsibility summons the church to work towards genuine community, in which each ethnic group remains faithful to its dynamic and changing identity and yet is enriched by and enriches others. In this way, the churches must seek to contribute not only to the development of each culture but also to bring harmony among all those who share the Christian faith.

The church is called to participate in the mission of God to establish God's new creation, to bring everything together under the lordship of Christ (Eph. 1:10). This is to be done by inviting people to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as by struggling together for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The

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**20** Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 441.

church therefore needs to challenge structures and practices of economic, political, sexual, racial, ethnic and other kinds of oppression, recognizing the intersecting nature of these oppressions and their specific impact on equality within community.

The churches are called to move towards visible unity in order to proclaim the gospel of hope and reconciliation for all people and to show a credible model of the life that God offers to all. Christians, though scattered in diverse cultures, have been redeemed for God by the blood of the lamb to form one multi-cultural community of faith. The 'blood' that binds them as brothers and sisters is more precious than the 'blood', the language, the customs, the political allegiances or economic interests that may separate them. This is the essence of Paul's ethic of shared responsibility in summoning Christians to account for their freedom in Jesus Christ in their daily endeavours.

## Conclusion

We cannot afford the luxury of selecting one aspect or another of Paul's teaching. We must interpret Paul in some appropriate way for ourselves in the light of our circumstances. But understanding Paul's argument in his context will give respect and appropriate understanding rather than passing judgment or interpreting Paul out of our own ignorance of the apostle. I am persuaded that life-forming principles should be derived from the teachings of Paul.

In essence, Christians must be ready to help all those who are stumbling rather than condemning and expelling them. This action is reciprocal; no privileged group stands out from the rest, as we are reminded by C. K. Barrett: 'I must bear up the burdens that weigh my fellows down, but I cannot look to anyone else to bear my responsibilities. All Christians are equal, and all share in responsibility for the good of the whole.'[21]

The church is challenged constantly to search the scriptures critically, to open itself up to new insights and honestly acknowledge where it has abused scripture to justify its own understanding of issues that divide people. The church is called to examine and explore its relations with people of other faiths. Jesus Christ is our paradigm of the responsible person. Jesus shows us what it means to be faithful to God and to other people, to be free from the power of evil and from the accepted ethos of the time, to release into the world a transforming power, to love others unselfishly and sacrificially, to hope in face of suffering and defeat. An ethic of shared responsibility is ultimately a new paradigm, which teaches us what it means to be human and to be responsible.

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**21** Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, p. 90.

ERT (2006) 30:1, 95-96

# Book Review

Baptists Together in Christ 1905-2005
A Hundred-Year History of the Baptist World Alliance
Richard V. Pierard (editor)

Falls Church, Virginia: Baptist World Alliance, 2005
ISBN 1-931985-13-8
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*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,* Evangelical Review of Theology

*Baptists Together in Christ* is a scholarly history of the Baptist World Alliance, the voluntary association national Baptist unions and conventions around the world, embracing over 100 million people. The book, which covers the period 1905 to 2005, was launched at the Baptist Centenary World Congress held in Birmingham, UK in July 2005.

The book consists of ten chapters telling the story in chronological sequence from the pre-history prior to 1905 up to 2005. The authors are drawn from North America, UK, Europe and Australia, with overall editing by well-known Baptist historian, Richard V. Pierard and two associate editors. The Foreword is by Billy Graham (a featured speaker at most of the recent BWA world congresses) and the Afterword by the current General Secretary, Dr Denton Lotz. The fully indexed and documented text is supported by a large number of photographs of Baptist life around the world, several lists of BWA officials, staff and conferences, and an annotated bibliography. An additional feature is a series of boxes and photographs providing cameos of the presidents and other leading figures in the movement such as John Clifford, G.W. Truett and Nilson Fanini.

Although the Baptist movement is now approaching its 400th anniversary, and for much of that time the 'fellowship of kindred minds' even on a global basis has been positive, as this book shows, global organisation has come rather late. Even now, with well over 200 unions or conventions in membership, and others joining all the time, as a voluntary movement, the BWA still does not embrace all Baptists—the most notable group now not in membership is the large Southern Baptist Convention which withdrew in the hundredth year over ideological differences.

As a denomination made up of independent churches and unions, and without a central hierarchy, the issue of interest to scholars and church people is whether such a global organisation was proper, necessary, or important, and even granted a positive answer, whether it could in fact be achieved. The saga unfolded in these pages shows how the able and dedicated leadership of some outstanding people such as Clifford, Shakespeare, Prestridge and many others, built on the groundswell of the grass roots support, and was able to overcome all kinds of obstacles. It managed to deal with the effects of two world wars and other decisive conflicts in which substantial numbers of Baptists were on both sides of the lines of hostilities.

In due course, there emerged an organisation that is neither exclusively church or para-church, but one that effectively harnesses its members around the world for evangelism, mission, theological education, and ministry with youth, women and men. Its greatest achievements over a substantial period of its life have undoubtedly been in the area of advocacy for justice and religious freedom and lat-

terly, aid and relief. Holistic mission of this kind is appropriately flagged by Lotz (along with evangelism and nurture) as key ministries for the future.

For much of its history, the truly global character of the BWA was a dream, dominated as it was by European and North American interests. But as time progressed, it has become more internationalised in its personnel and interests, and more regionalised in its programs. Perhaps more importantly, it has become a voice for many in diverse parts of the world who desperately need it, especially in relation to the vision and comprehensive range of values it has embodied and expressed.

Much of the narrative of a book like this necessarily involves details of organisation and programs, yet the authors have also succeeded in presenting the dynamic which has driven the movement and the varied personalities that have led it. In particular the content of speeches, papers and reports have been effectively summarised, so that interested readers are able to interact with the substance of global Baptist thinking, which gives a feel for the developments that have been documented.

There are plenty of issues facing Baptists around the world and as a global body, many of which are listed in Lotz's thoughtful Afterword, including social justice, the nature of church and ministry, and ways of effective evangelism. This volume indicates that the BWA is likely to continue making a significant contribution on these topics, as it has in the past. But perhaps the more substantial question revolves around the role of a global church body in a post-denominational age.

**Baptism, Church and Society**
**in England and Wales from the Evangelical Revival**
**to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry**

David M. Thompson

The theology and practice of baptism have not received the attention they deserve. This book discusses the theology of baptism and popular belief and practice in England and Wales from the Evangelical Revival to the publication of the World Council of Churches consensus statement on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982).

**David M. Thompson** is Fellow and President of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, and Reader in Modern Church History in the University of Cambridge.

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David F. Wright

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**David F. Wright** is Emeritus Professor of Patristic and Reformed Christianity, New College, University of Edinburgh.

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