

# DALLAS WILLARD'S THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM<sup>1</sup>

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Among American evangelicals,<sup>2</sup> there is a growing dissatisfaction with evangelism efforts that do not result in genuinely transformed lives. In recent years, scholars and ministry leaders have sought to respond to this problem in part through publications and conferences that propose a more integrated understanding of evangelism and discipleship.<sup>3</sup> However, one of the most helpful voices that speaks to this concern has largely been overlooked—the philosopher and Christian author Dallas Willard (1935-2013).<sup>4</sup> While Willard's influence on Christian formation and discipleship is well-established, few recognize how much his theology is articulated as a critique against modern notions of evangelism and as a corrective to them. Thus, unfortunately, though Willard's profound theology of evangelism and discipleship is replete with insights for contemporary evangelism and mission, a recent search of “Willard, Dallas” in the main theological research database—the ATLA Religion database—did not result in the mention of a single peer-reviewed article explicitly exploring the missiological implications of his work.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, this exploratory paper is one step toward correcting this neglect in hopes of furthering conversation on the important integration of evangelism and discipleship. It is *not* an exhaustive examination of Willard's theology of evangelism.<sup>6</sup> Nor does it claim that Willard has developed a comprehensive theological treatment of evangelism.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, this paper argues that Dallas Willard's theology<sup>8</sup> contains a critique of modern evangelism and a corrective proposal to it—what he calls “discipleship evangelism”<sup>9</sup>—

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that can enrich the mission of the Church in the West. The paper is divided into three parts. The first section of the paper establishes that evangelism is indeed a central concern in Willard's life and work and demonstrates how his theology of evangelism is largely a critique of prevalent elements of evangelism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second section focuses on Willard's soteriology and how it is the basis for his unique reframing of the relationship between evangelism and discipleship. The final section delineates Willard's unique contributions to a theology of evangelism, criticisms of his theology of evangelism, and future areas for research.

### **Framing Willard's Theology of Evangelism**

#### *Willard the Evangelist*

Evangelism, broadly understood as "proclaiming, manifesting, and teaching" the gospel to those who have not fully responded to it, including those present in local churches, was *the* overarching concern of Willard's life and work.<sup>10</sup> Gary Black, Jr., the first to complete a dissertation tracking the influence of Willard's thought and author of *The Theology of Dallas Willard*, asserts that "though Dallas was known as a world-class philosopher, theologian, professor, spiritual director, and writer, more than anything else he was an evangelist."<sup>11</sup> Willard's commitment to evangelism appeared even when he was a college student. Gary Moon, director of the Dallas Willard Center for Christian Spiritual Formation at Westmont College, notes that Willard and his wife, Jane, were involved in "student-led evangelistic activities" while in college in the mid-1950s.<sup>12</sup> Willard's evangelistic commitment continued when he became good friends with individuals from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship while he was a doctoral student at the University of

Wisconsin. Moon states that these friends and others “helped [Willard] gain a vision for the importance of the academy to the kingdom and for the university as a place of evangelism.”<sup>13</sup> Willard’s inclination towards working in the university as a place of evangelism was cemented when one of his professors echoed what he sensed God had been telling him: “If you go to the church you will have the church, but if you go to the university, the churches will also be given.”<sup>14</sup> Willard chose the university and spent 1965 through 2012 as a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California (USC). A number of his former students at USC have testified to how he shaped their spiritual journey.<sup>15</sup> Thus, though Willard was far from the stereotypical evangelist,<sup>16</sup> his vocational decision was strongly shaped and directed by an evangelistic commitment.

Hence, it makes sense that Willard would describe himself on more than one occasion as “essentially a Southern Baptist evangelist” according to Todd D. Hunter, an Anglican Bishop and former President of Alpha USA.<sup>17</sup> This seems to be confirmed in Willard’s writings which are essentially concerned with helping people come to know Jesus’ message afresh. In 1997, Willard would open his most influential book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, with these words: “My hope is to gain a fresh hearing for Jesus, especially among those who believe they already understand him.”<sup>18</sup> While Willard wrote mostly to people familiar with Jesus, he believed they possessed the kind of “familiarity” that “has led to unfamiliarity,” an unfamiliarity that “led to contempt” and “contempt [that] led to profound ignorance.”<sup>19</sup> Willard’s aim was to write in such a way that awakened people to the wisdom and intelligence of Jesus as the master teacher of life.<sup>20</sup>

Lastly, Willard's evangelistic commitment is most consistently seen through his relentless focus on the gospel throughout his work. Black in *The Theology of Dallas Willard* describes Willard's theology this way:

At its core, Willardian theology pursues, articulates, and forcefully defends the proposition that the impact and essence of the original (proto) gospel (*euangelion* or *evangel*) Jesus preached, manifested, and taught remains a vital ontological reality, which is understandable, incarnational, relational, and as readily available today as it was two millennia prior.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Willard is centrally concerned with the reality of the good news of the kingdom that Jesus preached, manifested, and taught being tangibly communicated to others today as a concrete basis for every day human life. Reflecting on Willard's grasp of the gospel, Todd D. Hunter writes these striking words: "In my considered view, Dallas proclaimed the gospel according to Jesus better than any evangelist of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries."<sup>22</sup> Clearly, it will be helpful to take a look at Willard's theology of evangelism.

### *Dallas, Billy, and Dawson*

Willard's theology of evangelism is in many ways a critique of the prevalent understanding of the gospel and conversion that emerged from 19<sup>th</sup> century American revivalism. This paper will not offer an extensive treatment of how Willard's views relate to this history, though it is a topic worthy of research.<sup>23</sup> Instead, it offers brief comments on some elements of evangelism that have been prevalent in American evangelicalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, it considers approaches to evangelism in the ministry of Billy Graham and the Navigators para-church ministry started by Dawson Trotman.

In many ways, Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist minister like Willard, represents the essence of modern evangelism. He has been a model of integrity, wisdom, and commitment to faithful proclamation of the gospel for innumerable people.<sup>24</sup> The critical comments that follow in no way seek to detract from the profound legacy and influence of Graham's life and ministry. Nevertheless, all of us are products of our times, and Graham was no exception. As an evangelist deeply shaped by the history of revivalism, Graham's conception of evangelism had at least two problems.<sup>25</sup> The first relates to what Grant Wacker in his recent biography, *America's Pastor*, calls Graham's "preached theology."<sup>26</sup> According to Wacker, Graham preached to "nearly 215 million people in person in 99 countries and perhaps another two billion through live closed-circuit telecasts."<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, in reaching the masses, Graham's crusade sermons and other forms of communication "reduced the chance for theological depth."<sup>28</sup> As Hunter states concerning Graham's preaching, one "cannot do mass evangelism without a mass message [and] mass messages cannot handle subtlety or nuance."<sup>29</sup> Thus, while Graham's message over the years consistently emphasized key themes,<sup>30</sup> for many, he fundamentally focused on "the evangelical essentials of human sin and divine forgiveness."<sup>31</sup> In so doing, Graham's streamlined message inadvertently contributed to what Willard later called "the gospel of sin management" "on the right," that is, a gospel message with excessive focus on sin and guilt rather than the whole life transformation available now by apprenticeship to Jesus in the kingdom of God.<sup>32</sup> Of course, Graham and his associates have been respected for their integrity and devotion to living out the gospel in life, yet the urgent and oversimplified message they preached to the masses failed to communicate the fullness of the kingdom now.

A second problem in Graham's conception of evangelism is revealed in the methods he employed. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) often had an excessive focus on technique to convert people through the crusades they planned and led.<sup>33</sup> If Wacker is right to say "Graham did not possess a strong historical consciousness" concerning revival's predecessors, then it may be correct to say he failed to understand how much he was shaped by Charles Finney's emphasis on technique and systems that were uncritically embraced by Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday.<sup>34</sup> As an entrepreneur, Graham knew in his most honest moments, according to Wacker, that "revivals had to be worked up as well as prayed down."<sup>35</sup> He adapted evangelism methods from Billy Sunday, such as his "delegation technique" for reaching large metro areas as well as added techniques, such as a more "complete follow-up system based on the Navigators."<sup>36</sup> The BGEA became known for their relentless dedication to reach as many people as possible, but occasionally this was done without careful attention to whether the end justified the means.<sup>37</sup> Thus, William McLoughlin rightly argued that "the traditions and technical developments of the profession [revivalism] have followed an unbroken line from Finney's laws of the mind to Graham's engineering of mass consent."<sup>38</sup>

Despite these problems, Billy Graham significantly shaped evangelism in American evangelicalism as well as the Navigators para-church ministry started by Dawson Trotman.<sup>39</sup> Willard argued that the truncated gospel message that emerged from revivalism was preserved in the ministry of the Navigators, and as a result evangelism was significantly separated from being integrally connected to discipleship.<sup>40</sup> However, before explaining this in more detail, it is vital to note, as Willard puts it, "Navigators were far better than their theology and their program."<sup>41</sup> As their slogan still says today, their intent

was “To know Christ and to make him known.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Willard even calls the founder of the Navigators, Trotman, “one of the greatest of 20<sup>th</sup> century Christ followers.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, despite the exemplary lives of many of the Navigators’ ministry leaders, their theology was in some ways damaging for evangelism. For one, the gospel the Navigators preached, like Graham’s, was “strictly a gospel of forgiveness of sins and assurance of heaven after death upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>44</sup> In many ways, theirs was a gospel of “winning converts” not making disciples.<sup>45</sup>

This gospel shaped the methods of outreach that guided the Navigators. They maintained three stages of commitment.<sup>46</sup> The first stage was for a person to become a “convert.”<sup>47</sup> This took place by believing and accepting the gospel of salvation for the forgiveness of sin. The second stage was to become “a disciple,” which was “to be in training to become a soul winner.”<sup>48</sup> The final stage was to be a “worker.”<sup>49</sup> This was a person who helped others “win converts.”<sup>50</sup> For Willard, an unfortunate consequence of this typology of spiritual commitment is that it severs the integral relationship of evangelism and discipleship by making becoming a disciple “an optional further stage in commitment” to Christ.<sup>51</sup> This led Willard to state that in the Navigators, “the essential disconnection between post-WWII evangelicalism and discipleship prevailed and still prevails today.”<sup>52</sup> Together with the legacy of revivalism present throughout Graham’s ministry, the Navigators unconsciously contributed to one of the great problems facing the Church in the West today. It is this legacy that Willard confronted.

## Reframing Evangelism

### *The Gospel*

The fundamental way Willard challenged the legacy of Billy Graham, the Navigators, and their predecessors was through stretching out the shrunken gospel of American evangelicalism. Willard grasped that our understanding of the gospel shapes our understanding of conversion, and our understanding of conversion directly shapes our approach to evangelism.<sup>53</sup> This is why Willard's theology of evangelism—and his theology in general—was completely oriented around an expanded understanding of the gospel, the gospel that Jesus himself preached.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, before offering an overview of Willard's understanding of the gospel, it is essential to consider the gospels he rejected, what he called “the gospels of sin management.”<sup>55</sup> The gospels of sin management are essentially forms of the good news that are excessively preoccupied with “wrong doing or wrong-being and its effects.”<sup>56</sup> They are gospels which fail to account for “the transformation of life and character.”<sup>57</sup> While these gospels primarily appear in two forms, the gospel on the left and the gospel on the right, because Willard did not speak as extensively about the gospel on the left this paper will only give attention to the gospel on the right.<sup>58</sup>

The gospel on the right, for Willard, is largely represented by Christians who overly stress that the gospel is *only* about forgiveness and having correct beliefs about God. For those proponents of the gospel on the right, the atonement—the saving work of Jesus Christ—is exclusively limited to his death on the cross for our sins, and most often the penal substitution theory in particular.<sup>59</sup> This has led to what Willard calls “vampire Christians.”<sup>60</sup> These are people who want Jesus' blood for forgiveness of sin, but they do not want to enlist as his students in life for the transformation of character. While affirming

the gospel is about Jesus' death bringing the forgiveness of sins, Willard is critical of those who hold "justification to be the same as salvation" in fear that justification might be understood as somehow completely divorced from sanctification.<sup>61</sup>

For Willard, the gospel on the right is insufficient. This distorted understanding of salvation fails to account for how Jesus should inform life now. Willard believed that "Much of evangelism today is rooted in [this] misunderstanding of salvation."<sup>62</sup> Against this soteriology, then, he calls for a recovery of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom. Briefly, three critical aspects of this gospel are described before looking more directly at how it informs Willard's theology of evangelism.

Principally, Willard contends that all religion "presents itself as based on knowledge."<sup>63</sup> This is no less true for the Christian faith nor its central message—the gospel. However, by knowledge, Willard does not simply mean cognitive claims agreed upon through mental assent. Instead, he holds that "knowledge is accurate representation of reality."<sup>64</sup> Drawing on philosopher Edmund Husserl's work, Willard contends that Christian faith references an objective reality—e.g., God, Jesus, the kingdom—that exists beyond our mental perceptions.<sup>65</sup> Further, as a direct realist,<sup>66</sup> Willard believes this objective reality exists and can be accessed sufficiently and interacted with appropriately through a combination of the right authority, reason, and experience.<sup>67</sup> What does this have to do with the gospel? Willard concurs that the gospel of the kingdom is an immaterial reality that can be accessed as knowledge. Reflecting this understanding, according to Black, Willard once described the gospel as "the benevolent knowledge of the way things really are."<sup>68</sup>

Still, knowing that the gospel is knowledge about the way things really are does not tell us much about its content. Essentially, for Willard, the content of the gospel is “the good news that the kingdom rule of God is available to humankind here and now.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the kingdom *is* the gospel.<sup>70</sup> In a time when many Christians in the U.S. perceived the gospel as only about the cross—despite the work of Biblical scholars such as George Ladd,<sup>71</sup> Willard’s writings repeatedly stressed that Jesus’ central message was the kingdom of God. It is this inaugurated kingdom that the gospels show Jesus proclaiming, manifesting, and teaching to his listeners.<sup>72</sup> In a telling metaphor, Willard captures the power of the availability of the kingdom here and now that Jesus announced.<sup>73</sup> He narrates how, as a child in southern Missouri, there was no form of electricity except through lightning. However, one day the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) came and made electrical power available to all the residents of the town. He goes on to say “the power that could make their lives far better was right there near them where, by making relatively simple arrangements, they could utilize it.”<sup>74</sup> This, Willard asserts, is Jesus’ message: arrange your life around the reality of God’s rule here and now and enter into a new kind of existence.<sup>75</sup>

This leads, then, to a final important aspect of the gospel for Willard. The gospel Willard preaches is essentially about discipleship, which he often described as becoming an apprentice or student of Jesus. Indeed, he sums up *The Divine Conspiracy* by saying it “presents discipleship to Jesus as the very heart of the gospel.”<sup>76</sup> Later in the book, he argued that those who speak for Christ must “constantly ask themselves” these questions:

Does the Gospel I preach and teach have a natural tendency to cause people who hear it to become full-time students of Jesus? Would those who believe it become his apprentices as a natural “next step”? What can we reasonably

expect would result from people actually believing the substance of my message?<sup>77</sup>

These are indeed critical questions to probe if the church is to recover discipleship at the heart of the gospel. This gospel, for Willard, has a direct bearing on our life now. Hence, Willard often points to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 as the most substantial presentation of how we enter into the experience of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom.<sup>78</sup> From Willard's perspective, it presents the gospel as inherently an invitation into apprenticeship to Jesus, that is, becoming a student who learns from Jesus as the master teacher of life. It is now possible to turn to the way discipleship is related to evangelism in light of the gospel of the kingdom.

*The Proposal: "Discipleship Evangelism"*

Dallas Willard reframes evangelism as inherently interrelated to discipleship throughout his work. However, the most explicit and concentrated development of his theology of evangelism likely appears in chapter eight of *The Divine Conspiracy* under a major section heading entitled "Helping Others Find Their Way Into Discipleship."<sup>79</sup> Willard makes the claim that people "who have found their way in [the kingdom] will inevitably want to share the new reality they have found with those around them."<sup>80</sup> He goes on to answer the question "How do we do it?" by expanding on a three-part answer: "we must, of course, be disciples, we must intend to make disciples and we must know how to bring people to believe that Jesus really is the One."<sup>81</sup> Essentially, Willard reframes evangelism by illustrating that discipleship is (1) the foundation of evangelism, (2) the focus of evangelism, and (3) the form of evangelism. To substantiate this claim, it is necessary to draw significantly on chapter eight of *The Divine Conspiracy* as well as some

of his other work to offer a tentative explanation of what he calls “discipleship evangelism.”<sup>82</sup>

Foremost, Willard contends that we must “be disciples” to make disciples.<sup>83</sup> This is to say that discipleship is the foundation or basis for effective evangelism. Willard believes that we need to know “by personal experience” what a disciple is to make one.<sup>84</sup> According to Willard, this reality is attested to on the pages of the New Testament, for it is what “the first generation of Jesus’ people” did.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, Willard says “nondiscipleship is the elephant in the church.”<sup>86</sup> Our lack of a clear and developed plan to help others come to know and follow Jesus in all of life undercuts the vibrancy of the Church’s missional engagement. Discipleship is crucial as the foundation of evangelism because, as Willard once said at a conference, “Christianity is caught by contact.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, it makes sense that he argued in his posthumously published book on apologetics, *The Allure of Gentleness*, that “the ultimate apologetic—that is to say, the ultimate lifter of doubt—is the believer acting in faith in an interactive life with God.”<sup>88</sup> For Willard, as people live in the reality of the kingdom, they cultivate credibility and a robust experience that others are invited into.

A second way Willard reframes evangelism is by arguing that discipleship is the focus or goal of evangelism. To help others into the way of discipleship, he states, we must come to a place of “intending to make disciples.”<sup>89</sup> To do this, discipleship “must be our conscious objective, consciously implemented, to bring others to the point where they are daily learning from Jesus how to live their actual lives as he would live them if he were they.”<sup>90</sup> Such an orientation avoids deemphasizing discipleship, what he calls “the great omission,” and instead fulfills Jesus’ intent that we make disciples based upon Matthew

28:18-20.<sup>91</sup> This takes seriously the fact that Jesus does not call us to make converts but disciples.<sup>92</sup> Willard is seeking to place transformation at the heart of the call to evangelism. This is most evident in a definition of evangelism that was developed under his supervision of the Theological and Cultural Thinkers (TACT) group:

Spiritual transformation into Christlikeness requires a conscious, clearheaded and public commitment to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. That is, a decision to give our lives to him as his constant students, learning from him how to live all aspects of our lives as he would live them. Evangelism should be understood as a call to receive the gift of such a life.<sup>93</sup>

Evangelism, for Willard, is an invitation to be transformed as a disciple of Christ. He aims for what Gordon T. Smith has called “beginning well,” that is, ensuring that evangelism is merged with discipleship so that people have a full conversion and are stabilized as they start their journey of faith.<sup>94</sup> Willard states this strongly when he says “efforts in evangelism [must be] very purposively reoriented toward *bringing people to the point of regeneration and discipleship*. The work of turning people to Christ is not done until that point (author’s italics).”<sup>95</sup> The goal of evangelism, then, for Willard, is “full throttle discipleship.”<sup>96</sup>

Third, Willard articulates that discipleship is the form or means of evangelism in which the Church should engage. Specifically, Willard says “you lead people to become disciples of Jesus by ravishing them with a vision of life in the kingdom of the heavens in the fellowship of Jesus.”<sup>97</sup> How do we ravish others? Just as Jesus himself did: proclaiming, manifesting, and teaching the kingdom of God. We do not merely disciple Christians by proclaiming, manifesting, and teaching the kingdom of God. We disciple those who are *not yet disciples of Jesus* recognizing they already are someone’s disciple. This hinges on a penetrating series of statements that Willard makes:

Who teaches you? Whose disciple are you? Honestly. One thing is sure: You are somebody's disciple. You learned how to live from somebody else. There are no exceptions to this rule, for human beings are just the kind of creatures that have to learn and keep learning from others how to live.<sup>98</sup>

Everyone is being disciplined by someone. Willard's statement is a confirmation of what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann demonstrated in *The Social Construction of Reality*, namely, that humans are socialized into certain ways of being in the world, and we have the capacity to be resocialized.<sup>99</sup> Most significantly, Willard's emphasis on discipleship as the form or means of evangelism reflects the way of Jesus himself. For instance, assuming the Gospel of Mark tells the story of the gradual unfolding of the twelve disciples' conversion as Richard Peace suggests, we see Jesus discipling the twelve through proclaiming, manifesting and teaching the kingdom before they fully know and commit to who he is.<sup>100</sup> Hence, Willard says that the most important thing to do is to teach others who are not followers of Christ to "be inspired to experiment; that is, they will *try something*" by relying on the resources of God's kingdom (author's italics).<sup>101</sup> Consequently, discipleship, for Willard, is not merely a form of evangelism, but rather *the* form of evangelism.<sup>102</sup>

### **Assessing Willard's Theology of Evangelism**

It is worth repeating that this paper has not attempted to offer a comprehensive overview of Willard's theology of evangelism. Still, recognizing this, the third section, offers a tentative assessment of some elements of Willard's theology of evangelism. It comments briefly on Willard's unique contributions to the Church's mission today, critiques his theology of evangelism, and suggests some key areas for future research.

### *Willard's Unique Contributions*

One of the most valuable contributions that Dallas Willard offers in his theology of evangelism is a rejection of the shrunken gospel of American evangelicalism and a recovery of Jesus' gospel of the kingdom. More than most scholars and ministry leaders in the last 25 years, Willard has helped to counter the minimalist gospel that was at times heralded by Billy Graham, the Navigators, and their predecessors. However, while many emerging church leaders at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gleaned from Willard's expanded soteriology,<sup>103</sup> there are still countless churches with a shrunken gospel distorting their view of conversion and evangelism. Thus, Willard's understanding of the gospel is a welcome corrective for the renewal of the Church's mission.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, as Black argues, Willard's theology of evangelism reformulates the "activistic" theological distinctive that David Bebbington notes has been so central to many evangelicals.<sup>105</sup> Traditionally, this activism focused on proselytizing to "get people into heaven."<sup>106</sup> However, Willard's reformulation provides a broader understanding of evangelical activism on the basis of the gospel of the kingdom and his penetrating account of the synergistic relationship between evangelism and discipleship.

Third, Willard's theological account of evangelism restores the importance of integrity for Christian witness. His insistence that discipleship is the foundation of evangelism offers a strong threat to the moral ambiguity that has all too often surrounded many engaged in the ministry of evangelism.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, his focus on discipleship as the goal of evangelism jettisons the idea that a passion for evangelism justifies using any technique or tool to "win the lost."<sup>108</sup>

Lastly, related to this, Willard presents a theologically sophisticated understanding of evangelism that directly correlates initial conversion with ongoing conversion. He refuses to fully separate justification and sanctification. As a result, he may have indirectly made a contribution to what Gordon T. Smith has described as “a sea change” in American evangelicals’ understanding of conversion.<sup>109</sup> Willard suggests that we invite people to interact with Jesus and the reality of the kingdom even before they believe. In so doing, when a person comes to faith in Jesus, they are already engaged in disciplines and practices that can continue to foster their formation in Christ.

### *Critique*

Of course, this assessment of Willard’s theology of evangelism would be incomplete without some critique of his work. There are at least three major critiques to offer. The first is that Willard largely fails to escape the individualistic notion of conversion that he inherited from American revivalism more generally and his Southern Baptist roots more specifically. Like Billy Graham, his fellow Southern Baptist, Willard, in general, has an overly individualistic orientation to conversion. This is not to say his stress on individuals apprenticing themselves to Jesus is biblically inappropriate, nor did Willard altogether neglect the importance of Christian community.<sup>110</sup> However, Willard does lack a well-developed ecclesiology from which evangelism naturally ebbs and flows.<sup>111</sup> One such ecclesiology wedded to evangelism is seen in Bryan Stone’s *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*.<sup>112</sup> Stone draws on the work of Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and others to argue that “the most evangelistic thing the church can do today is to be the church.”<sup>113</sup> Evangelism, then, emerges from the

alternative way of being human that the Church embodies through subversive practices—such as “worship, forgiveness, hospitality, and economic sharing”—seen in Jesus’ life and continued in the early church.<sup>114</sup> Willard might have benefited from such a connection between evangelism and ecclesiology.

A second critique is that though Willard delineated a robust theological anthropology in *Renovation of the Heart*, he does not allow it to substantively inform a theology of evangelism that aims for full-bodied conversion.<sup>115</sup> As a philosopher, he too often falls prey to an intellectual orientation of evangelism that focuses on trying to “change the belief system that governs” our lives.<sup>116</sup> Instead, his theology of evangelism could have been more informed by the Augustinian insight that James K.A. Smith elaborates on in *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation*.<sup>117</sup> Smith contends that humans are not merely thinking beings, nor believing beings, but rather desiring beings.<sup>118</sup> Though Willard’s theology of the body affirms this in many ways, he still at times is overly focused on the cognitive dimension. What would his theology of evangelism look like if it explored what it means to invite people to a re-ordering of their loves *through being apprenticed to a worshipping community* oriented to Jesus as both the great Lover and the great Lord?<sup>119</sup>

Lastly, while Willard and Gary Black, Jr.’s *The Divine Conspiracy Continued* presents a compelling vision for advancing the gospel of the kingdom in all sectors of society for the common good, it does not operate with any obvious and explicit preferential option for those who are most hurting, poor, and oppressed.<sup>120</sup> Thus, though Willard criticizes the gospel on the left for an excessive concern with sin and its effects on social systems, he himself does not *extensively* consider how Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom

challenges some of the major socio-political realities of North American society. For example, to my knowledge, Willard very rarely, if ever, gives any sustained attention to the way the gospel of the kingdom challenges the classism, racism, and sexism that is so prevalent in American culture.<sup>121</sup> For Willard, the kingdom into which people are invited is completely about personal character formation, which supposedly will lead to systemic transformation.<sup>122</sup> Thus, he fosters a theology of evangelism that is not keenly attuned to how the gospel of Jesus *directly* speaks to gross systemic injustice in the West and also throughout the world.<sup>123</sup> Unlike Mortimer Arias in *Announcing the Reign of God*, Willard cannot see the holistic evangelism that is part and parcel of Jesus' announcement of the kingdom.<sup>124</sup>

#### *Future Research*

Many areas for future research on Dallas Willard's theology of evangelism could be mentioned, but space permits mentioning only a few. Foremost, there is a need for further study on how Willard's theology of evangelism is a departure from and revision of understandings of the gospel, conversion, and evangelism inherited from American revivalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such work, among other things, will need to place Willard in conversation not merely with Billy Graham but his predecessors that shaped him, such as Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, and others.<sup>125</sup>

There is also much that could be gained by placing Willard's theology of evangelism in conversation with that of William Abraham. There are at least two compelling similarities in their theology of evangelism.<sup>126</sup> For one, they both stress the gospel is fundamentally about the kingdom of God. As mentioned above, Willard aims to

recover the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached, manifested, and taught, and Abraham emphasizes “the gospel of the reign of God that was inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>127</sup> Second, they both articulate a theology of evangelism that is concerned with movement towards or into the kingdom. Willard once spoke about evangelism as “getting people in motion towards the kingdom.”<sup>128</sup> Abraham developed an ecclesiological rich notion of evangelism “as that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.”<sup>129</sup>

Finally, while general research should be done to consider how Willard’s understanding of evangelism may manifest in a local church and in one-on-one relationships,<sup>130</sup> it would especially be important to consider how his theology of evangelism might inform evangelism efforts among emerging adults in the West. Specifically, how can his understanding of discipleship as the foundation, focus, and form of evangelism increase the integrity, vitality, and relevance of evangelism efforts among spiritually open emerging adults today?<sup>131</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that Dallas Willard’s theology contains a critique of modern evangelism and a corrective proposal to it—what he calls “discipleship evangelism”—that can enrich the mission of the Church in the West. The paper began by establishing that evangelism is indeed a vital concern in Willard’s work and that his theology of evangelism is largely a critique of prevalent elements of evangelism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Second, it focused on the priority of the gospel of the kingdom in Willard’s theology and his unique

reframing of the relationship of evangelism and discipleship in light of it. The third section offered an abbreviated assessment of Willard's theology of evangelism.

Clearly, there is much to gain as we reimagine the relationship between evangelism and discipleship in our day. Dallas Willard is a seminal voice in this conversation. His theology of evangelism contains a depth and insight that has yet to be taken seriously. This paper ends with Willard's final words addressed to a room of professors, pastors, and students at the Wheaton College Theology Conference in 2009. May they be an inspiration for more Christ-centered witnesses of the vital link between evangelism and discipleship:

The future of vital Christian life lies in the hands of the pastors and others who teach for Christ—especially including those who teach pastors. What will they do? The greatest field open for *discipleship evangelism* today is the North American and European churches and seminaries... They are full of people hungering for the real life which... is offered in companionship with Christ in his kingdom (author's italics).<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper would not have been possible without the tremendous support of several people. I am especially grateful for the mentorship and guidance of Richard Peace. While on his sabbatical, he generously supervised a directed study I proposed on Dallas Willard's theology and provided constant encouragement and advice. I am also thankful for the valuable feedback of Gary Black, Jr., Todd D. Hunter, Jennifer M. Rosner, Dennis Okholm, and, my patient and loving wife, Dominique Monet Clark. Of course, all viewpoints and flaws herein are my own.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I am using David Bebbington's four distinctives of evangelicalism to identify evangelicals: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, activism. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2-17.

<sup>3</sup> The interrelationship of evangelism and spiritual formation was a special concern in *Witness: Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* Vol 26 (2012). It included an editor's note entitled "Evangelism and Spiritual Formation" by Mark Teasdale, as well as an insightful article by Christopher B. Smith entitled "Missional Acuity: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Insights toward a Redemptive Way of Seeing." As of April 30, 2016, the editor's note and the article could be accessed here: <http://journals.sfu.ca/witness/index.php/witness/issue/viewIssue/4/4>. Furthermore, the relationship of evangelism and spiritual formation has long been a concern in the work of Richard Peace. See his paper entitled "Prayer, Evangelization and Spiritual Formation" which was delivered at the Evangelism Roundtable at Wheaton College in 2001. As of April 28, 2016, it could be found here: <http://www.wheaton.edu/~media/Files/Centers-and-Institutes/BGC/Roundtable/2001/2001-Peace.pdf>. It is also worth mentioning what he calls his "trilogy on contemplative evangelism," which includes *Holy Conversation: Talking about God in Everyday Life* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2006), *Noticing God* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2012), and his forthcoming work tentatively entitled *Contemplative Evangelism*. Moreover, one of the seven paradigms of evangelism that Rick Richardson delineates in his "Evangelism as Social Capital: The Bridge-Building and Bridge-Breaking Dimensions of Different Paradigms and Practices of Witness" in *Witness: Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* Vol 28 (2015) is that of "evangelism as recruiting and making disciples," which he notes "integrates evangelism and discipleship effectively" (17). As of April 30, 2016, this article could be accessed here: <http://journals.sfu.ca/witness/index.php/witness/issue/viewIssue/2/2>. Numerous recent books have also

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addressed the interrelationship of evangelism and discipleship. For example, Elaine Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism: A Contemplative Vision for Christian Outreach* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), Todd D. Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2009), Alan Hirsch, *Disciplism: Reimagining Evangelism through the Lens of Discipleship* (Exponential, 2014), and Bobby Harrington and Bill Hull, *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?* (Exponential, 2014). Lastly, some conferences have reflected the growing interest in integrating evangelism and discipleship. In 2014, Exponential, supposedly the world's largest gathering of church planters, made its conference theme "rethinking evangelism" within "the context of discipleship," featuring speakers such as Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, Dave Gibbons, Francis Chan, and Tim Keller. Several e-books focused on evangelism were published as part of the conference, including Hirsch's *Disciplism* and Harrington and Hull's *Evangelism or Discipleship*. As of April 28, 2016, information about the 2014 East Coast Exponential conference could be found here: <https://exponential.org/events/2014east/>. Information about the 2014 West Coast Exponential conference could be found here: <https://exponential.org/events/2014west/>.

<sup>4</sup>At this time, I am only aware of three individuals that have published work addressing Willard's theology of evangelism: Bill Hull, Todd D. Hunter, and Gary Black, Jr. Bill Hull's *Conversion and Discipleship: You Can't Have One without the Other* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016) draws on Willard's insights to propose an understanding of conversion that is not severed from discipleship. Hull, who calls himself a "discipleship evangelist," seems to, at the very least, indirectly acknowledge the integral connection of discipleship and evangelism in Willard's work. His *Conversion and Discipleship* aims at a popular audience and, from my perspective, is not primarily focused on explicitly describing the *theology of evangelism* that emerges from Willard's corpus. However, Todd D. Hunter has published material in book form *directly* considering Dallas Willard's theology of evangelism. His essay "Dallas Willard, the Evangelist" in *Eternal Living* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2015) is exceptional. While not necessarily aimed at a scholarly audience, it holds profound insights into Willard's theology of evangelism. I will refer to his work in this paper. I should also note that Hunter's *Christianity Beyond Belief* is largely a distillation of his Doctor of Ministry dissertation completed at George Fox University, which significantly drew on Willard's thought. It was entitled *Rehearing the Gospel toward Improved Practices of Evangelism and Discipleship* (Dmin. diss., George Fox University, 2006). On a final note, Gary Black, Jr.'s *The Theology of Dallas Willard* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013) offers illuminating comments on issues related to Willard's revision of evangelical activism which are quite germane to Willard's theology of evangelism (75-81). Also, Dallas Willard and Gary Black, Jr.'s, *The Divine Conspiracy Continued* (New York: HarperOne, 2015) can be read as describing the kind of redemptive social engagement that should emerge as a result of Willard's understanding of evangelism and discipleship. While I benefit immensely from the work of Hull, Hunter, and Black, this paper is distinct in at least a few ways. For one, I frame my investigation of Willard's theology of evangelism in light of the academic literature on evangelism. Second, I propose a fresh systematic outline of how Willard understood the relationship between evangelism and discipleship drawing on an often overlooked section of Willard's *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). Third, I provide a critical assessment of Willard's theology of evangelism.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Porter has similarly lamented the lack of scholarly attention to Willard's work in his "The Willardian Corpus" in the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* Vol 3, No. 2 (2010): 241.

<sup>6</sup> Among other things, an exhaustive examination of Willard's theology of evangelism would need to take into account of all of his work in the field of both Christianity and philosophy. This brief article does not attempt to engage his distinctly Christian writings comprehensively, let alone his philosophical work. As of April 30, 2016, many of Willard's articles in the field of Christianity and philosophy could be accessed at <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/default.asp>.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Willard does not articulate the kind of extensive theological treatment of evangelism that William Abraham calls for in "A Theology of Evangelism: The Heart of the Matter," in Paul Chilcote and Lacey Warner, eds., *The Study of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008). Still, Willard's theology of evangelism is substantial and worth exploring in light of Abraham's work. More on this below.

<sup>8</sup> I am not seeking to establish the claim that Willard, even though a philosopher by training, is worth studying for his theological insights. This has been substantiated through Gary Black, Jr.'s *The Theology of Dallas Willard*.

<sup>9</sup> I will explore this term below in Willard's work. However, I should note here he does not seem to have been the first to use it. The term appears as a subheading in Mortimer Arias' "The Great Commission: Mission as Discipleship" *The Journal of Evangelism in Theological Education* Vol 4 (1989): 19. Arias does not elaborate on the term at length, but he does speak of "discipleship evangelization" in ways that are in affinity with Willard's work. He also cites the work of some of his contemporaries who were working on the

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interrelationship of discipleship and evangelism in their own way such as Thomas Groome, David Lowes Watson, Robert Coleman, and William Abraham (20). As of April 30, 2016, this article could be accessed here: <http://journals.sfu.ca/witness/index.php/witness/issue/viewIssue/26/10>.

<sup>10</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 288-289. Below I will illustrate how Willard's understanding of evangelism is intimately connected with discipleship. Of course, it is worth stating that Willard's broad view of evangelism does not focus solely on reaching "the lost" as many conceptions of evangelism have. I am indebted to Gary Black, Jr. for this point and for urging me to stress more fully how evangelism was *the* intentional objective in Willard's life. Future work could examine more carefully how Willard's understanding of evangelism relates to biblical and historical notions of evangelism. See the definition of evangelism, for example, in the Lausanne Covenant in 1974. Accessed 26 April 2016. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>. In addition, Willard's understanding of evangelism should be placed in conversation with David Barrett, *Evangelize!: A Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1987); Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003); and David Bosch, "Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross Currents Today" in *The Study of Evangelism*. See also Bosch's discussion of evangelism in *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 409-420.

<sup>11</sup>Gary Black, Jr., *Preparing for Heaven: What Dallas Willard Taught me about Living, Dying, and Eternal Life* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 265.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Moon, ed., *Eternal Living: Reflections on Dallas Willard's Teaching on Faith and Formation* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2015), 19. Moon is currently working on a biography of Dallas Willard.

<sup>13</sup> Moon, *Eternal Living*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see the essay by Brandon Paradise, a former student of Willard's, entitled "From Secular Philosophy to Faith" in *Eternal Living*, which explores how Willard did not evangelize him as typically understood but did contribute to the renewing of his faith.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to clarify that Willard was not aiming to overtly get people to become Christians. In his "My Journey to and Beyond Tenure at a Secular University," concerning his presence at USC, he states "I'm not there to be a witness. I'm there to do a good job as a teacher and writer. I will be a witness. I can't help that. The only question is, "What am I going to witness to?" And I take a lot of comfort from Jesus' statement that you cannot hide a city that is set on a hill. So I don't have to think about it. I have to try to do real good work; and that's my business – to do real good work." Accessed 21 April 2016. <http://www.dwillard.org/biography/tenure.asp>.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, *Eternal Living*, 187. This observation is proffered by Todd D. Hunter.

<sup>18</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, Willard believed all of his efforts needed to be undergirded by God's empowering grace. In Wesleyan fashion, he often spoke of grace as not merely pardon but power. For a sample of some of his insightful comments about the nature of grace, see his *The Great Omission* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 61, 162.

<sup>21</sup> Black, *Theology of Dallas Willard*, xv.

<sup>22</sup> Hunter, *Eternal Living*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> For a treatment of Willard's relationship to evangelicalism, including its revivalist roots, see Gary Black, Jr.'s, *The Theology of Dallas Willard*, especially chapter one.

<sup>24</sup> My own life has been profoundly impacted by the life and ministry of Graham, for which I am grateful.

<sup>25</sup> This is by no means an attempt to offer a full assessment of Graham's theology of evangelism. The most full-length treatment of Graham's theology of evangelism of which I am aware is Thomas P. Johnston, *Examining Billy Graham's Theology of Evangelism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2014), 51. See chapter one for a more extensive overview of Graham's "preached theology."

<sup>27</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 53.

<sup>29</sup> Todd D. Hunter, Personal Interview, May 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Wacker states Graham's core message can be summarized: "Bible, God, sin, Jesus Christ, new birth, growth in grace, second coming, reward (or punishment), and mission" (33). Wacker does note that over time some elements of Graham's theology were modified. See *America's Pastor*, chapter one.

<sup>31</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 55.

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- <sup>32</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41. More will be said about this below.
- <sup>33</sup> It should be kept in mind that the BGEA and the Navigators have changed for the better over time.
- <sup>34</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 138. Wacker asserts that when speaking of his predecessors, Graham mostly mentioned D.L. Moody and occasionally Billy Sunday. Of course, Sunday did directly stimulate many of his ideas about how to do mass evangelism.
- <sup>35</sup> Wacker, *America's Pastor*, 137.
- <sup>36</sup> William McLoughlin Jr.'s *Modern Revivalism* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1959), 467. If space permitted, we might consider how this shaped evangelism and discipleship in the local church.
- <sup>37</sup> As Graham retells the story of his ministry, it is clear he and the BGEA were learning as they went along and constantly adapting the best methods they could often with little time to think about their theological implications. This was especially true after the surge of interest in Graham's work from the 1949 Los Angeles crusade. See Billy Graham, *Just As I Am* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), chapter nine. I am grateful to Richard Peace for pointing this out to me in a personal conversation in April 2015.
- <sup>38</sup> McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 528.
- <sup>39</sup> Obviously, American revivalism had an influence on the Navigators. Space will not permit an exploration of this reality.
- <sup>40</sup> For the comments in the next two paragraphs I am drawing on Willard's "Discipleship" in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). As of April 30, 2016, this could also be accessed here: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=134>.
- <sup>41</sup> Willard, "Discipleship," 236.
- <sup>42</sup> As of April 30, 2016, the Navigators still described their mission in this manner. See <http://www.navigators.org/Home>.
- <sup>43</sup> Willard, "Discipleship," 237.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Willard discusses this also in *The Great Omission*, 4. He refers to the book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) written by LeRoy Eims, a former worker with the Navigators. This book, according to Willard, reflects their philosophy of ministry with its three stages of the Christian life: the convert, the disciple, and the worker.
- <sup>47</sup> Willard, "Discipleship," 236.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Willard, "Discipleship," 236.
- <sup>52</sup> Willard, "Discipleship," 237.
- <sup>53</sup> I was first made aware of the idea that our understanding of conversion shapes our approach to evangelism through the work of Richard Peace. See Richard Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 286. Willard seems to operate with this conviction.
- <sup>54</sup> Willard's understanding of the gospel should be studied more. Also, it is worth considering how his philosophical commitments undergird his view of the gospel, conversion, discipleship, and evangelism.
- <sup>55</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> For a more thorough overview of the gospels of sin management, which Willard says manifest as the gospel on the left and the gospel on the right, see his *The Divine Conspiracy*, 42-55.
- <sup>59</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 42. For two of the many works that seek to broaden evangelicals understanding of the atonement, see Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007) and Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Atonement* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2011). Unfortunately, to my knowledge, Willard does not engage these works.
- <sup>60</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, 14.
- <sup>61</sup> Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation" in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2010), 47. Gary Black, Jr. proposes that Willard "reconnects" justification and sanctification (69). If this is correct, Willard is doing something similar to Gordon T. Smith in his *Beginning Well* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2001). While Willard uses different terminology than Smith, I believe he would mostly agree with Smith's statement: "To put it differently, justification and sanctification are distinct but inseparable. Sanctification is not possible without justification;

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we cannot hope for personal transformation until we are accepted, forgiven and set right in Christ. But sanctification must follow justification. Sanctification is the very purpose of justification” (22).

<sup>62</sup> Dallas Willard, “Rethinking Evangelism” in *Cutting Edge*, Winter 2001. As of April 28, 2016, this article could be accessed here: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=53>.

<sup>63</sup> Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 19.

<sup>64</sup> O’ Rourke, *Dallas Willard Dictionary*, 170. See also chapter one of *Knowing Christ Today*. It is particularly intriguing how Willard differentiates between knowledge, belief, commitment, and profession.

<sup>65</sup> Black, *Theology of Dallas Willard*, 160-162. Willard rejects the utter subjectivism of Kant and the overconfident foundationalism of fundamentalists. In some ways, Lesslie Newbigin articulates a similar though distinct epistemological stance in his exceptional *The Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>66</sup> The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* argues that direct realism is based on two main theses. At the risk of oversimplifying, these are that (1) “we *directly* experience external material objects, without the mediation of either sense-data or adverbial contents” and (2) “the justification or reasons for beliefs about material objects that result from sense experience do not depend on the sort of inference from the subjective content of such experience.” See “Epistemological Problems of Perception” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed 25 April 2016. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-episprob/#DirRea>. For more on the term “direct realist” in relation to Willard, see Black’s *The Theology of Dallas Willard*, 162.

<sup>67</sup> Elaine O’ Rourke, *Dallas Willard Dictionary* (San Bernardino: Soul Training Publications, 2013), 170. See also *Knowing Christ Today*, 15-19.

<sup>68</sup> Gary Black, Jr., “Remembering Dallas” in *The Divine Conspiracy Continued*, xvi.

<sup>69</sup> Dallas Willard’s *Hearing God* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1999), 156. Willard also speaks of the kingdom as the range of God’s effective will. See *The Divine Conspiracy*, 25.

<sup>70</sup> Thanks to Gary Black, Jr. for pointing this out to me through email correspondence in April 2016.

<sup>71</sup> For example, George Ladd’s *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993) and *Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in The Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959). I do not mean to imply that all biblical scholars understood the gospel of the kingdom the same way.

<sup>72</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 288-289. This is the typical way that Willard describes Jesus’ communication of the gospel of the kingdom.

<sup>73</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 30-31.

<sup>74</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* Willard also counters the gospel as solely about a future heaven through arguing that eternity is about both a quantity of life and a quality of life. He states that eternal life begins now and goes on forever. See chapter one of *The Divine Conspiracy*, entitled “Entering the Eternal Kind of Life Now.”

<sup>76</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, xvii.

<sup>77</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 58.

<sup>78</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 97.

<sup>79</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 299.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> This term actually appears as only a subheading for the second point on how to “help others into the way of discipleship.” However, I think it can be used to accurately describe his entire effort to reframe evangelism for three reasons. For one, it is implied that he has been speaking of evangelism as related to discipleship throughout the entire section. He only directly mentions “evangelism” under the second point to explicitly assert that he is reordering the traditional understanding of evangelism into what he calls “discipleship evangelism.” Second, Willard once said in an interview published as “Rethinking Evangelism” that he was “uncomfortable with the distinction between evangelism and discipleship” (n.p.). In this same interview, he raises the question, “how do you do ‘evangelism-discipleship?’” (n.p.). This is essentially the same term used in *The Divine Conspiracy*. Third, Willard uses the phrase “discipleship evangelism” in an article referred to above entitled “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation.” As of April 28, 2016, this article could be accessed here: <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=135>. For all these reasons and more, the term “discipleship evangelism” seems appropriate to describe Willard’s theology of evangelism.

<sup>83</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 299.

<sup>84</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 300.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 301.

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<sup>87</sup> Dallas Willard, “How Spiritual Formation Empowers and Informs Kingdom Living,” Church of the Open Door, November 2004. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://www.thespiritlife.net/facets/warfare/48-paradigm/paradigm-av/3741-how-spiritual-formation-empowers-and-informs-by-dallas-willard>.

<sup>88</sup> Dallas Willard’s *The Allure of Gentleness* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 168.

<sup>89</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 302.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, ix-xv.

<sup>92</sup> Willard, *Great Omission*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 47.

<sup>94</sup> Smith, *Beginning Well*, 10.

<sup>95</sup> Willard uses the term “regeneration” in some ways to merge the reality of justification and sanctification. In “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation” Willard says, “Regeneration, entry of God’s nature and life into our real existence and identity, has, as a natural progression or part, entry into the status of discipleship to Jesus Christ in the power of the new life” (78). Interestingly, Wacker seems to argue something similar was key for Graham. See his comments on regeneration in *America’s Pastor*, 34.

<sup>96</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, Revised Edition, (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2012), 239.

<sup>97</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 305.

<sup>98</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 271.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967). The authors use the terminology primary socialization and secondary socialization (130-131). Somewhat related to this, see Brad Kallenberg’s superb *Live to Tell: Evangelism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), which uses philosophical insights to provide fresh perspective on evangelism.

<sup>100</sup> Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, chapters five and six. See Mark 2:15, 3:14-15, and 6:30-32.

<sup>101</sup> Willard, *The Allure of Gentleness*, 168.

<sup>102</sup> Alan and Deb Hirsch have done some creative work on discipleship as a form of evangelism in *Untamed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010). See also Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), especially 35-42. Furthermore, if space permitted, it would be worthwhile to explore Willard’s paradigm of evangelism in light of the paradigms Richardson delineates in “Evangelism as Social Capital” in *Witness*, especially “evangelism as recruiting and making disciples.”

<sup>103</sup> Gary Black, Jr. describes Willard as a significant influence on emerging church leaders in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Black cites Willard’s influence among emerging church leaders as documented in Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49; and Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller, *Finding Faith* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 32.

<sup>104</sup> Space has not permitted me to engage more fully with the vast literature on the *missio Dei*. For example, it would be helpful to consider Willard’s understanding of mission in light of Christopher J. H. Wright’s *The Mission of God* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 2006) and other important works.

<sup>105</sup> Situating Willard’s theology in light of the four distinctives of evangelicalism David Bebbington notes, Gary Black, Jr. in *The Theology of Dallas Willard* shows that though Willard affirms “evangelicalism has traditionally focused intensely on the areas of biblicism, activism, crucicentrism and conversionism,” he maintains that “only biblicism and conversionism are quintessential to orthodox Christian expression” (57). For him, crucicentrism and activism “should naturally emerge from an appropriate consideration and application of Christian biblicism and conversionism” (57).

<sup>106</sup> Black, *Theology of Dallas Willard*, 76.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Peace explores this in “Prayer, Evangelization and Spiritual Formation.”

<sup>108</sup> This phrase, while not necessarily wrong, can often create an “us-versus-them” mentality.

<sup>109</sup> Gordon T. Smith, “Conversion and Redemption,” ed. Gerald R. McDermott *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 209. See also Smith’s *Transforming Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010).

<sup>110</sup> For examples of Willard’s emphasis on community, see chapter ten in *Renovation of the Heart* entitled “Transforming our Social Dimension,” chapter nine in *Preparing for Heaven* entitled “Relationships,” chapter seven of *The Divine Conspiracy* entitled “The Community of Prayerful Love,” and chapter three of *The Theology of Dallas Willard*, which includes a section on ecclesiology on 132-140. I am grateful for Gary Black, Jr. reminding me of these passages that highlight Willard’s emphasis on relationships.

<sup>111</sup> This is perhaps in part due to Willard’s de-emphasis on the importance of the practice of baptism. Simon Chan in *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic,

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2006) challenges evangelicals to recover a more robust ecclesiology, one that makes being a worshipping community central to its identity. Thanks to Dennis Okholm for sharing this resource. In my reading of Willard's work, I have found that he most often speaks of baptism as "immersing people into Trinitarian reality" largely through teaching as a counter to those who focus on baptism as simply getting people "wet." As a result, he underemphasizes baptism as a key rite for incorporation into the Church. Both perspectives are helpful. See how he interprets Matthew 28:18-20 in *Renovation of the Heart*, 240, 267.

<sup>112</sup> See Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

<sup>113</sup> Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom*, 15. I imagine Lacey Warner's forthcoming *Living Church* will also be an important work that articulates an understanding of evangelism rooted in a robust ecclesiology. Her stimulating lecture on the scholar-evangelist at the Academy of Evangelism for Theological Education in 2015, can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeb1Pulz8\\_M&list=PL2AEkV5KQ3sbOzkipLKtMvcj-O943cuGu](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xeb1Pulz8_M&list=PL2AEkV5KQ3sbOzkipLKtMvcj-O943cuGu).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*.

<sup>116</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 305.

<sup>117</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Smith draws on the work of St. Augustine among many others. See also Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) and his recent distillation of some of these ideas in *You are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016). It would be worth exploring more fully Willard's theology of the body, discipleship, and evangelism in relation to Smith's project.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 41-47.

<sup>119</sup> While Willard's VIM (vision, intention, means) pattern described in chapter five of *Renovation of the Heart* is similar to my suggestion here, he does not place *significant attention* on people being apprenticed to a whole community in which they can learn the life of discipleship to Jesus as Lover and Lord.

<sup>120</sup> Willard and Black, *The Divine Conspiracy Continued*, 21, 31, 54.

<sup>121</sup> It may be that I am overlooking some of Willard's contributions. I know he supported women in leadership and wrote the foreword for editor Alan Johnson's *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010). In addition, one of his articles on poverty entitled "The Disciples Solidarity with the Poor" appears in Gary Black, Jr.'s Dallas Willard reader entitled *Renewing the Christian Mind: Essays, Interviews, Talks* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), chapter twenty-five.

<sup>122</sup> From my perspective, Willard underemphasizes the power of systemic evil or what Paul calls "the principalities and powers." *The Divine Conspiracy Continued* offers Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Desmond Tutu, and Mother Teresa as examples to argue that these activists' work towards social change "eludes those who misrepresent Paul's description of 'principalities and powers'" (194). Willard and Black seem to underestimate the complex institutional and spiritual forces at work in the systems they worked against by suggesting that individual heart change is the ultimate means of changing institutions. Walter Wink's *The Powers that Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) makes a compelling case against such an approach through his insistence that a larger spirituality exists behind institutions that must be addressed. Likewise, N.T. Wright's work has demonstrated the value of personal transformation *and* direct confrontation of systemic realities as part of the Church's mission. For one example of this in his popular work, see *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), especially chapter thirteen. I should note that Willard does address structural evil in *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988). However, he believes that structural evil is most fully dealt with through individual character formation. See chapter eleven, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

<sup>123</sup> Willard's theology had the resources for a strong social critique, but, perhaps due to his unique focus and commitments, he was not able to develop it as fully as it could have been. Though Willard focused his work on some issues and not others, it does not mean he was unconcerned about them. He left work for others to do. Thanks to Gary Black, Jr. for helping me to grasp the latter point.

<sup>124</sup> Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>125</sup> This work should engage Willard's "Discipleship" in Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*. As is evident in Willard's essay, he had tremendous respect for both Graham and his predecessors, especially Charles Finney. He contended that those who were influenced by Finney failed to retain his emphasis on holy living, that is, a kind of integration between evangelism and discipleship.

<sup>126</sup> Of course, there are also significant differences. For one, Willard lacks Abraham's robust ecclesiology.

<sup>127</sup> William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 17.

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<sup>128</sup> Dallas Willard, "Living in the Knowledge of Christ and his Kingdom," Ecclesia Network Gathering 2013. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://ecclesianet.org/category/media/ecclesia-events-podcast/>.

<sup>129</sup> Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 95. The six activities that Abraham articulates are conversion, baptism, morality, creedal understanding, spiritual gifts, and spiritual disciplines.

<sup>130</sup> The best description of a church wrestling to apply Willard's theology of evangelism of which I am aware can be seen in Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken's *Renovation of the Church* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2011), especially chapter eight. Gary Black, Jr. has also published ethnographic work on four churches embodying various aspects of Willardian theology in "Finding Protoevangelical Faith: A Summary of Four Ethnographic Studies" *Ecclesial Practices* Vol 2 (2015): 129-155. For a description of how Willard's theology of evangelism might work itself out in one-on-one relationships, listen to the end of Willard's talk entitled "Living in the Knowledge of Christ and his Kingdom." Towards the end of the lecture in response to a question he describes how he understands personal evangelism. Accessed 28 April 2016. <http://ecclesianet.org/category/media/ecclesia-events-podcast/>.

<sup>131</sup> This question would need to be explored drawing on the research of Beth Seversen and Rick Richardson in "Emerging Adults and the Future of Evangelism" in *Witness: Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* Vol 28 (2015): 31-52. As of April 30, 2016, this article could be accessed here: <http://journals.sfu.ca/witness/index.php/witness/issue/viewIssue/2/2>.

<sup>132</sup> Willard, "Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation," 58.