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Past Presidents of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education

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In This Issue

This issue of the *Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* begins with John Phelan's 2003 plenary address to the Academy at North Park Theological Seminary. It represents a response to present-day evangelism's failure to engage and enlist the world beyond the church. Reflecting on the exhaustion, frustration, and discouragement of those whose ministries have come up short despite redoubling their efforts, he ponders whether today's evangelistic enterprise needs to be rethought. Phelan is convinced that part of the solution is "disentangling the gospel from our cultural and national stories." In postmodern North America, how do we proclaim the gospel "with winsomeness and courage?" he asks. You'll be interested in his well-considered suggestions.

The theme of conversion figures prominently in this number of the *Journal*. With James Engel and William Dyrness, Phelan worries that the recent emphasis on "rapid conversions and growing numbers" has resulted in "many adherents and few disciples." In his article on "Conversion and Culture in Early Christianity," Alan Kreider asks what early leaders and churches thought about the meaning of conversion. However, instead of giving a definition, he sets out to show, from the literature of early Christianity, some of the components of conversion, ingredients without which they thought "the conversion cake would crumble, or taste like something else." Kreider's essay is more than a history lesson though. It is an important reflection piece that underscores how much our views have changed and constrains us to ask if it has been for the good.

In another substantial piece, James A. Scherer raises a different question about conversion. Wanting to insure that conversion "remains and *must remain* a central goal and an irreplaceable part of Christian mission and evangelism," he examines how conversion has been affected by certain modern emphases. In an essay redolent of his acclaimed comparative studies in world mission theology (in *Gospel, Church, and Kingdom*, Augsburg, 1987), Scherer weighs key Conciliar, Catholic, and Evangelical statements on conversion against contemporary factors which threaten its central place – especially the acceptance of interfaith or interreligious dialogue.

In an important addition to our knowledge of how churches foster conversion and gain new disciples, George Hunter adds to his reputation as the dean of Church Growth thinking by spotlighting two overlooked ways churches grow. Enlarging on the well-established categories of internal, expansion, extension, and bridging growth, he describes what he calls "catalytic growth" and "proliferation growth." Of the former, he observes that just as catalysts induce chemical reactions, certain factors catalyze surges of church growth. Of the latter, he shows how, just as trees can produce new roots, shoots, branches, limbs, twigs, leaves and blossoms "and thereby so proliferate that the mature plant may not resemble the same plant when it was much younger," so the proliferation of congregations and ministries can produce remarkable changes in churches. Thus, through images borrowed from chemistry and botany, Hunter lays out important clues to understanding an infectious dynamic seen in growing

Christian movements, as well as a dynamic that comes about through structural innovations.

Next, we have the results of Ed Stetzer's investigation of how theological institutions are preparing those God has called to church planting. Is interest in training church planters on the rise or on the wane? How many Christian colleges, universities, and seminaries are offering stand-alone courses or concentrations in church planting? What are some of the other training innovations schools are adopting? His findings may surprise you.

Finally, Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison challenge us to look anew at evangelistic preaching as a way of bringing together friends and foes of traditional approaches. Their solution is to switch the focus from preacher and sermon to community and context. They'd like our feedback.

Thanks to Kenneth Gill, our book editor, and the submissions of our members and others, you will find reviews of new books in the field following our articles. Thanks, as well, to our Managing Editor, Derrel Watkins for all of his behind-the-scenes work.

We are especially grateful to Henry H. Knight III who, in the strong tradition of his predecessors, David Lowes Watson and Richard Stoll Armstrong, dependably put together a first-rate resource for professors and students of evangelism for six years. The consistent quality of the Academy's journal under Hal Knight's oversight has earned the appreciation and approval of many. I hope I will be able to follow well his consistent example. Of course, that will substantially depend on your contributions, feedback, and ideas as well, for as Professor Knight has often said, the *Journal* is a team effort.

The *Journal* is the only transdenominational scholarly publication dedicated to evangelism. As such, its contributors represent a rich range of backgrounds, experiences, viewpoints, and research interests. They also represent a variety of specialities: theological, historical, sociological, and more. Nevertheless, all our writers have in common their dedication to the discipline of evangelism studies.

On a sad note, we record the passing of former AETE President, Dr. Lewis E. Drummond. We honored him at last year's gathering of the Academy in Chicago, and we noted that, even in illness, his enthusiasm for proclaiming the gospel was undiminished. "If I could show you a scholarly evangelist, a preacher of the Word, a biblical expositor, an encourager, a visionary leader, a gracious host, a good Samaritan, it would be Lewis Drummond," said a friend and former colleague. Well put… And well done, Professor Drummond. You will be missed!

Finally, we are pleased and proud to convey the news that our academy president for most of the year, Dr. Scott J. Jones, is now Bishop Scott J. Jones. We offer him our congratulations, thanks, and prayers. Because Bishop Jones' new responsibilities will demand his full attention, the duties of President of the Academy are now in the capable hands of Dr. Hal Poe.

Art McPhee

Editorial: On Withholding Good News

Second Kings contains the story of four lepers in a desperate dilemma. Troops of Aramaeans (from ancient Syria) had the city of Samaria surrounded. Under siege, the city's food supplies had dwindled to nothing. Inside its gates was famine and at least one instance of cannibalism. Outside its gates were the lepers, stuck between the city and the invaders. The lepers knew that, inside or outside, they would starve. Their only chance for survival was to go to the camp of the Aramaeans and plead for their lives. So, that is what they did.

However, when the lepers reached the camp, they found it abandoned. God had caused the Aramaeans to hear the rumble of chariots and horses, and the commotion of a great army. Thinking the Israelites had hired the Hittites and Egyptians to rout them, they fled in terror. In fact, in their haste to retreat, they left behind tents, animals, food, supplies – everything. So you can imagine the amazement of the lepers. And, just as easily, you can imagine what they did. They ate, they drank, and they started to carry off the silverware. Then came second thoughts. "This isn't right," they said to one another. "This is a day of good news." So they went to the city and told the king's household (2 Kings 6:24-7:9).

Many present-day Christians and churches withhold good news too. Several of the articles in this issue of the *Journal* cite well-known reasons: embarrassment about manipulative, even coercive, methods of evangelism; religious pluralism and arguments about the arrogance of exclusivism; the emptiness of proclamation without demonstration; and frustration with failed methods and ministries. Most of us have met self-identified Christians who withhold what they say is "good news" to them because they illogically think that sharing their deep convictions is disrespectful and intolerant. However, on delving more deeply, we often find that what really troubles them is the imperious and disingenuous methods some have promoted and practiced, or the ease with which some evangelists cross the line from persuasion to provocation, or spotlighting one's denomination or church instead of Christ, or historical scandals (the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, stories of missionary complicity with colonialism, and the like). But suppose, on realizing their parenting practices were unsound and even shameful, a father and mother decided the best answer to their *bad* parenting was not *good* parenting, but *no* parenting. What would we think of them? What would their children think? Yet, there are those who decide by some process that the answer to good news presented as bad news, or good news presented badly, is to refrain from proclaiming the Good News at all. None of our writers would agree; in fact, all their articles urge the opposite. Nor would most of us agree. So, let us be clear in our classrooms and congregations: *our evangelism must be responsible evangelism; but withholding the Good News to avoid fresh embarrassments is the most irresponsible path of all.*

Art McPhee

Evangelism and its Discontents

John E. Phelan, Jr.

In his book *Live to Tell* veteran campus evangelist Brad J. Kallenberg shares the frustration and confusion he and his colleagues experienced in recent years when their best evangelistic efforts seemed to yield fewer and fewer results. Surefire techniques no longer seemed to bring the desired result. According to Kallenberg "those Willie Lomans who are now sweating as the window of opportunity closes in the West have doubled and tripled their efforts to salvage flagging ministries. On top of their exhaustion and discouragement" he argues "is a false guilt." They conclude, "'I must be doing something wrong' or more dangerous, 'something must be wrong with me.'"[1] Kallenberg, now a professor of religion at the University of Dayton, argues that such campus ministries are failing to reckon with the move from modernity to postmodernity. I will say more about postmodernity later, but whatever the reason, according to Kallenberg, once flourishing evangelistic ministries were now foundering.[2]

I have experienced the same desperation and frustration among friends in Europe. Nothing they try seems to work either. The Good News seems to be old news in many parts of Europe. Christianity has either been discredited by its own failings or is a quaint echo of a bygone era. It is now commonplace to wonder if the United States will suffer the same fate. Brian McLaren in one of his books wonders whether future tourists in the United States will visit Colorado Springs or Wheaton to see the Evangelicals like they visit Lancaster, Pennsylvania to see the Amish. In parts of Europe it is *already* that bad. Vast, empty churches bear testimony to the powerful faith of the past while serving as concert halls and tourist attractions. Are Kallenberg's campus evangelists the canaries in the mineshaft letting the American church know it could indeed suffer the same fate?

Many are now looking with hope to the growth of the church in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Andrew Walls, Philip Jenkins and others argue that the real center of the Christian faith has moved south. Whatever strength Christianity will have going forward will come from the energetic and vital churches in places like Brazil and Nigeria. While they agree about the vitality of many of these southern churches, James Engel and William Dyrness worry in their book *Changing the Mind of Missions* that American Evangelical missionaries' emphasis on rapid conversions and growing numbers resulted in many adherents and few disciples.[3] The horrors of fellow Christians butchering one another in Rwanda will not soon fade from memory. National, ethnic, and

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tribal loyalties seem consistently to trump loyalty to Jesus Christ whether the setting is Northern Ireland, Kosavo, Kigali or, indeed, Kansas City.

Engle and Dyrness also worry that the managerial methods so beloved of American Evangelicals are hindering their evangelistic efforts.[4] Like Kallenberg's sweating "Willie Lomans," Evangelicals plan their work and work their plan. They fail to notice, Engle and Dyrness argue, that they may be smuggling in the assumptions of modernity along with their technical expertise. Further, since all this technical expertise is expensive and since donors want to see immediate results, many mission agencies are forced to do things that give them "more bang for the buck" rather than things that build health into their churches. "Consider what happens," they write, "when ministry needs do not match donor priorities. Legitimate causes, such as leadership development or social justice, may need to be downscaled or even abandoned because of low donor interest."[5] In addition, well-meaning churches and mission agencies create an unhealthy dependence for outside money and expertise in churches and local leaders that would otherwise be able to serve their own cultures well without such support. They also often fail to indigenize the faith in these same cultures. All this causes them to wonder how deep and profound are those conversions touted by the missionaries to their donors. Once again are they adherents or disciples?[6]

Does this suggest the evangelistic task needs to be rethought? How might such a project be undertaken? I speak to you on these matters as an amateur – albeit one who has tried to do some reading and reflection on the challenges of evangelism. I do this because I want our students prepared to proclaim and live out the Good News of Jesus Christ. But I want them prepared to share the *gospel* and not a religious tinged version of American individualism. And I want them to be loyal to *Jesus Christ* and not merely to their denomination or theological tradition or their nation-state. For them to do this, their leaders and teachers must contemplate how they have gone astray and led others astray in their own configuration of the good news.

Modernity, Postmodernity, and Post Christian

These *are* troubling times for those who pay attention. What are we to do to reverse the decline of Christianity in the West and enhance its health there and elsewhere? I suggest more of the same will not work. This summer I attended a theology conference in Eastern Europe. Many if not most of the participants were from former Soviet bloc nations, although there were participants from Western Europe and the United States as well. I admire and appreciate the ministries of many of the leaders and participants in that conference. But I told one of my friends that I was concerned with the emphasis on rationalist apologetics. "It's as if," I said, "they want to turn these Eastern Europeans into enlightenment rationalists in order to convince them that isn't a

good thing to be!" This, I believe, is exactly the *wrong* strategy. The problem is, I have never been the same since I read Alasdair MacIntyre. Years ago when I was a pastor in Kansas I picked up a copy of his book *After Virtue* in a used bookstore. I had heard of MacIntrye but had never read any of his work. *After Virtue* reordered my thinking.[7]

I have often shocked people with my assertion that the problem with Fundamentalists is that they are Modernists. From MacIntrye I learned that as a good modernist raised in fundamentalism I had assumed that I possessed a rationality that could step outside every intellectual system and evaluate it from an objective viewpoint. I was persuaded of the essential neutrality of my judgment and clarity of my analysis. A scion of Enlightenment rationalism and American individualism, I believed I could not only *think* my way to the truth, I could lead others through a similar rational process to the truth. MacIntrye shattered my innocence. There was no such thing, he argued, as a transcendent rationality. There is no way to stand outside our own communities, our own experiences, and our own minds and evaluate the world. Our lives are bounded by stories, shaped by language, formed by common *practices* that are inescapable even if we are aware of them. What is eminently persuasive to me may bring a shrug, a perplexed stare or a statement of outrage from someone else, because we are operating out of a different story.

In *Foolishness to the Greeks* Lesslie Newbigin argues there are two equal and opposite errors evangelists may make. They may speak in a language no one in the host culture understands and simply fail to communicate the gospel, or they may so identify with a given culture than being a good Christian means no more than being, say, a good American or good Swede. Perhaps worse, they may communicate that being a good Christian *requires* one being a good American or good Swede – at least culturally![8] Missionaries are used to this challenge, if not always sure how to face it. But evangelists in the west have simply assumed they were operating out of the same rationality and from same story as those they were seeking to evangelize. But this is less and less the case. As George Hunter put it in a lecture, the church no longer has a home field advantage. Recognizing this at some level the church has lurched between obscurantism and accommodation.

There is now no lack of work being done to address this new situation. But clarity on what is really going on seems lacking! Some deny there really is anything new happening. Others are convinced a radical challenge is emerging. If I had a dollar for every time someone used the word "postmodern" at a theology conference in recent years, I could comfortably endow our seminary. Sometimes postmodernism is the whipping boy – an evil that needs to be overcome. Sometimes postmodernism represents an exciting new opportunity for the gospel and is to be welcomed. It is hard not to suspect that sometimes it is the latest bandwagon to roll up, the latest fad to be celebrated. I also have the sneaking suspicion that some Evangelicals, at least, have seized on

postmodernism in good modernist fashion as the latest tool in their evangelistic toolbox. It is easy to be skeptical!

And yet, something *has* happened. The Western world has shifted on its intellectual axis. We cannot assume that people in the United States and Europe, let alone the rest of the world, are playing by the same intellectual rules we are used to. People these days operate from dissimilar rationalities, conceptions of justice, and notions of the moral and the good – notions that have emerged from very different stories. In addition, many American Christians, especially American evangelicals, are just beginning to grasp how much they have distorted the story of the gospel with nationalist, rationalist, and consumerist assumptions. Disentangling the gospel from our cultural and national stories will not be easy. There will be many fits and starts. But I believe it must be done if we are to reclaim that message and address the emerging cultures around us with good news. It won't be easy.

Brian McLaren illustrates some of the difficulty in his recent *More Ready Than You Realize.* Conservative evangelicals he notes are used to feeling morally superior to the left. On issues like abortion and homosexuality they have struggled to remain faithful to what they believe the Bible teaches. McLaren argues the problem is that these evangelicals don't recognize that it is not just a matter of morality vs. immorality, but two *competing* views of morality! He compares the recent cultural battles to a football game. Conservative Evangelicals lost yards on school prayer, abortion and divorce. Now their backs are at their own goal line. Homosexuality "has become a line in the sand," he writes, piling on metaphors, "turf upon which a political power struggle occurs, a symbol of the loss of cultural dominance, a kind of moral 'last straw.'"[9]

But for the other side homosexuality is *also* a moral issue. But the story told is a very different one: "First the opponents," McLaren describes them as saying, "tried to gain ground on slavery, but our valiant defense rushed and sacked them on that one. Then, they tried to score on the continued disenfranchisement of women – first not allowing them to vote, then not allowing them to make personal decisions about reproduction, and also refusing to pay them fairly compared to men – but we managed to sack them again. Then, they tried to maintain their religious privileges and dominance over us through 'blue laws' . . . and school prayer, but again we penetrated their front line and they lost yardage. Now they are trying still to defend immoral and outdated ways of treating homosexuals in the same unjust and uncompassionate ways they used to treat blacks and women and Jews. They've been defeated in their injustice in the past and we can't let them turn the tide now."[10] Here we clearly have rival views of morality and justice based on different stories. McLaren warns both sides that intellectual or interpersonal coercion, seeing who can shout the loudest and denounce the fiercest, will not only not win anyone to faith in Christ, but likely compromise the gospel entirely. How then

can Christians keep the Good News good? How will we proclaim it with winsomeness and courage? I do not have a complete answer but will offer a couple of suggestions.

The Gospel and the Kingdom

My field is New Testament studies. I attended a fundamentalist Bible school and a conservative seminary. When I began to study the gospels seriously I was struck by Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God. The only sermons I had ever heard on the kingdom growing up were in the context of discussions of eschatology. The kingdom was God's promise for the future and had nothing to do with the present. Only "liberals" I had been taught, talked about the kingdom of God. Along with the "fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man and the social gospel" the kingdom was to be avoided.

But in the gospels Jesus was constantly preaching the kingdom of God and calling his disciples to join him in this preaching. For Jesus, the *Gospel, the Good News, concerned God's coming kingdom.* Jesus' preaching and teaching about the kingdom sounded quite different from what I was used to! I must say that Jesus *as teacher and preacher* was not important in my upbringing. He was important for working miracles and dying. His miracles proved he was God and his death took care of our sins. What Jesus *taught* was actually impractical and meant only for life in the kingdom. Here some of my teachers actually cited the interim ethic of Albert Schweitzer! We could perhaps draw some "principles" from the Sermon on the Mount, they would allow, but certainly couldn't take all that stuff seriously. But it seemed to me, to the contrary, that *Jesus* expected his disciples to take it seriously.

As time went on other things began to bother me. The Gospel seemed to be attenuated in other ways. People in my tradition spoke about accepting Jesus as their personal savior as they would of hiring Jesus as their personal trainer. There was something possessive about it. And clearly it was powerfully individualistic. Sometimes it seemed as if they had done Jesus a favor by "accepting" him! It was faintly insulting. Of course, following Jesus clearly has a personal dimension. After all he did call those disciples *individually* and they did need to make a decision whether to follow him or not. But was it only about *their* salvation from sin? Was it all only about *their* assurance of heaven? Where did the kingdom of God enter in?

I have argued to my students that Jesus is one of the most admired and ignored figures in human history. Throughout history he has become the spiritual equivalent of a wax nose bent to any shape required by the various powers that be. Conservatives saw him as the upholder of the social order. Radicals saw him as a revolutionary. Scholars sometimes put him in Berkenstocks and a Harris tweed! It almost seemed that on his own terms Jesus was hard to take! For example, in Dostoevsky's powerful story of the Grand Inquisitor, the fierce old man arrests Jesus when he returns to Seville. "Why

have you come to hinder us?" he asks. For fifteen centuries the church has been forced, the old inquisitor tells his visitor, to wrestle with the freedom he came to offer. Human beings are inveterate rebels. They cannot handle the offer of freedom. Actually, the old man says, it was the devil who had it right. Keep them in check with miracles and mysteries and authority. But you [Jesus] refused his good advice. "We will persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom and submit to us. . . . They will be convinced that we are right, for they will remember the horrors of slavery and confusion which thy freedom brought them." For the inquisitor, and many others, Jesus was a naïve idealist whose teachings were perhaps admirable but unworkable in the "real world."

And so Jesus has been managed and his gospel massaged. He has been tamed and made safe – although there was nothing safe about him, as the religious leaders of Israel were painfully aware. He was not safe because he was trying to set up an *alternative* community – a community that challenged not only the religious leadership of Israel, but the political leadership of Herod and of Caesar as well. The old inquisitor and all his brothers and sisters throughout history have recognized that Jesus' kingdom message is too dangerous and too provocative and must be shaped according to the needs of the culture and society. People need to be fed, crime needs to be suppressed, authority must be respected. Unadulterated doses of Jesus are too strong to be taken! Following Jesus in his pursuit of the kingdom does not seem practical. And so we have various forms of "Jesus Lite."

This brings me back to the question of Jesus, the kingdom, and Alasdair MacIntyre. Jesus came to form a community that lived by a different set of expectations, that was shaped by a different story and a different set of *practices.* These practices do not often make sense to kings, presidents, and Grand Inquisitors. Turning the other cheek, giving up your cloak, and loving your enemy sounds not only foolish but, in these days, subversive! A community where the least is the greatest and the most powerful the servant of all, sounds, to say the least, counterintuitive! A rejection of hierarchies and power grabs sounds naïve. Certainly very few denominations or, indeed, academic institutions have managed to model such egalitarianism and simplicity. And yet Jesus offers us a set of practices, which, if followed, would produce something powerfully new, provocative and, I believe, attractive.

I believe Jesus is calling us as disciples of the kingdom to take part in *no less than the renewal of the creation in the image of God.* With Stanley Grenz, "the biblical visionaries anticipate the establishment of the eternal community of a reconciled humanity dwelling within the renewed creation and enjoying the presence of the redeeming God."[11] This is God's work, of course, but it is anticipated and articulated in and through the *practices* of the Christian community. I am convinced that unless we strive to get our *practices* in line with Jesus' teachings of the kingdom we will never represent the kingdom of

God, never take part in the ongoing renewal of God's work begun in Christ and, thus, never do the work of an evangelist.

There is neither time nor space to discuss fully the practices that enable the Christian community to represent the presence of the kingdom. I will cite only two. I would suggest without much fear of contradiction that one of the chief human problems is what someone has called "the human will to violence." Jesus reveals God as one who causes "his rain to fall on the just and unjust." God does not play favorites – he even loves sinners! In fact, in Jesus, God is breaking the cycle of violence by offering God's unconditional love and forgiveness to rebels, sinners, and misfits who clearly deserve otherwise. Jesus calls on his disciples to mirror the nonviolence of God. For Christians, practicing nonviolence is *not* a political strategy (although, of course, it is part of the politics of the kingdom). In fact, as a political strategy it is foolish. Instead, Christians practice nonviolence to model the character of God who suffered violence on the Cross. By modeling nonviolence Christians reveal the character of God and the promise of God's kingdom.

A second practice consistent with the kingdom is the practice of egalitarian styles of leadership. Christians model egalitarian leadership not because it is the best way to get things done – in many cases it isn't – but because God has turned the world upside down by becoming our servant in Christ. Our practices of love, compassion, and humility; our love for justice, generosity and grace all reveal the character of God and reveal God's intent to make all things new. That God gifts *all* people, calls *all* of them to be priests, and declares *all* of them holy in Christ is perhaps the most radical egalitarian message of them all.

Our evangelistic efforts must do more than call people away from sin into a relationship with Christ, although they must do that. We also call people to join Christ's discipleship band in the proclamation and realization of the kingdom! This kingdom is good news for the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. This kingdom has its own story in exodus and exile, restoration and renewal, death and resurrection, and the new heavens and new earth. The parameters of our story are not national, ethnic, rational, or politically correct. They are neither wise nor clever. It is, as Paul puts it, "*in Christ.*" In the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus, something new is set loose in the world – a new power, a new life, a new possibility. This new thing is experienced in a new community that lives by a new set of expectations. "In Christ," Paul insisted, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female." All things are made new. We are called to work with God in making the creation he called "good" even better through the death, resurrection and ongoing redeeming work of Jesus, as well as through his teachings of the kingdom. Such a call to radical life and world changing discipleship could be quite attractive to postmoderns.

Perhaps, then, all the discussion about postmodernism helps us after all, not because it commends new techniques or approaches – though it may – but because it cuts us loose from old patterns and ways of thinking. Though painful and often frightening, it forces us to untangle faith and culture. It requires us to ask if we have focused on being better Americans or Canadians or Roman Catholics or Presbyterians more than we have focused on being better followers of Christ. And it sets us loose in the wild without a compass. But haven't God's people always done better when they have had to rely on the Spirit's direction? Besides, if this is where we go, we do not go alone. We go with a community intent on following the model and message of Jesus. We go as those driven back to Jesus and his announcement of the kingdom. We go with God, sharing God's vision of a new heavens and new earth. We go with uncertainties but with exciting possibilities as well.

Notes

1. *Live to Tell,* Brad J. Kallenberg, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002, p.12.

2. *Live to Tell,* pp.12, 13.

3. *Changing the Mind of Missions,* James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, p. 66.

4. *Changing the Mind of Missions,* pp.67, 68.

5. *Changing the Mind of Missions,* p.73.

6. *Changing the Mind of Missions,* pp.76, 77.

7. *After Virtue,* Alasdair McIntyre, 2nd Edition, Nortre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

8. *Foolishness to the Greeks,* Lesslie Newbigin, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986, p.6.

9. *More Ready Than You Realize,* Brian McLaren, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, p.30.

10. *More Ready Than You Realize,* pp.30, 31.

11. *Renewing the Center,* Stanley J. Grenz, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2000, p.216

Conversion and Culture in Early Christianity

Alan Kreider

In October 312, on the eve of a decisive battle, the emperor Constantine had a celebrated dream.[1] According to the early, unretouched version of Lactantius, Constantine was ordered to paint "the heavenly sign" on his soldier's shields. The next day, fighting under the "cypher of Christ," his troops were victorious in battle.[2] And soon thereafter, Constantine gave Christianity something unprecedented: a position of privileged equality among the Empire's religions. Further, he began to call the bishops his "beloved brothers," to adjudicate amongst contending Christian parties, and to divert public funds into basilica-building programs. So when was Constantine converted? Was it at the time of his pre-battle dream? Possibly so: many eminent historians have referred to Constantine's "conversion of 312."[3] Other historians, more cautiously, have referred to Constantine's conversion sometime later, when they adjudge that he came to give his exclusive adherence to Christianity.[4] And still other scholars, of course, have refused to accord any conversion whatsoever to Constantine – "a man essentially unreligious...a murderous egoist," to quote Jakob Burckhardt.[5]

I do not mention Constantine at the outset because he is the subject of this essay. I will, in due course, be discussing his controverted conversion. But I mention Constantine now simply because the disagreement among scholars as to when or whether he was converted demonstrates that they have also disagreed about what, in the early centuries of Christianity, it meant to be converted. So in speaking about conversion and culture in early Christianity I will try to establish, not a definition, but some components of conversion, some ingredients without which the conversion cake would crumble, or taste like something else.

To discover the necessary ingredients of conversion I find it helpful to begin with a life experience – that of a prominent second-century convert to Christianity, Justin of Rome. Justin reports, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (2-8), that he spent his early life in a peripatetic search for truth. Gradually he sampled many alternatives. Justin was more attracted to some than others, but he remained unconvinced by any of them – until he met an old man by the sea at Ephesus. This man, Justin reported, convinced him that the Hebrew prophets pointed to Jesus Christ and, also, that Jesus Christ's philosophy alone was "safe and profitable." For Justin, conversion thus involved a change of belief. And this new belief was confirmed by a new experience: Justin does not provide details, but he testified that "a flame was kindled in my soul."

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Belief and experience – these ingredients in Justin's conversion were augmented by two more. One of these was a change in behavior. According to his first *Apology* (14), Justin participated in a Christian community that saw itself as having renounced the domination of the demons. These demons expressed their stifling lordship in many ways. Justin knew Christians who had been addicted to occult practices and to sexual adventure. He also knew what he along with others had struggled with: an escalating materialistic discontent – "we...once took most pleasure in the means of increasing our wealth and property." Also a penchant for xenophobic violence – "we...hated and killed one another and would not associate with men of different tribes." Both materialism and violence were apparently part and parcel of the pre-convert Justin's life experience. But now, Justin reported, his behavior had changed. Now he was in a community where different things were normal: sexual continence, not adventure; the worship of God, not meddling with magic. Those who used to be restless accumulators "now bring what we have into a common fund and share with everyone in need." And the erstwhile exponents of violence and xenophobia "now after the manifestation of Christ live together and pray for our enemies and try to persuade those who unjustly hate us." The community's norms, Justin claimed, were expressions of the "fair commands of Christ," and these commands were transforming the behavior of the Christians and giving them a distinctive communal style.

For Justin conversion was thus a complex and multidimensional process of change. Those who chose to proceed to baptism were those who were "persuaded and believe that the things we teach and say are true"; conversion thus required adherence to proper belief. But behavior for Justin was fully as important as belief. Converts were people who not only believed but who could "promise to live accordingly." Transformed behavior was indispensable to conversion. As Justin argued, those not living as Christ taught "should know that they are not really Christians" (1 *Apol* 15). Belief and the will to a transformed behavior were not sufficient, however, for it was in the rite of baptism that the liberation actually took effect. Justin was reticent about describing the baptismal ritual, but his understanding of its effects is clear. Through immersion in the baptismal waters, the baptizands experienced a powerful reality. Justin describes this as rebirth, washing and illumination (1 *Apol* 61). Through this experience the baptizands became God's children "of free choice and knowledge." Furthermore, they thereby, as God's children, became brothers and sisters in their new locus of *belonging*, the Christian church; significantly, after their immersion, the baptizands were led to the assembly "to those who are called brothers" for the unifying actions of prayer, the kiss of peace, and the Eucharist (1 *Apol* 65-66). So conversion in second-century Rome, as Justin has described it, had involved a change of belief, but much more: it had also transformed behavior and given a new sense of belonging – all in a context of profound religious experience.[6]

A century after Justin, Cyprian wrote an account of *his* conversion. In this, many of the same ingredients are evident. As is well known, Cyprian was a successful Carthaginian rhetorician at the peak of his prowess. But Cyprian was dissatisfied with his lifestyle, possibly because he had met Christians such as the

presbyter Caecilianus whose lives seemed freer than his, less encumbered.[7] What were the aspects of his patrician lifestyle that he had come to be uneasy about? They included luxurious food: "When," he asked, "does one learn thrift who has been used to liberal banquets and sumptuous feasts?" Elaborate clothing: how can one who has been used to "glittering in gold and purple" become content with "ordinary and simple clothing?" Civic power and influence with fawning retainers: how can one give up the "charm of the fasces and of civic honors?"[8]

Cyprian felt himself to be addicted to an indulgent lifestyle. It was, he reported, a "gilded torment"; not only was it destructive in its impact upon other people, this lifestyle "held in bondage" those, including Cyprian himself, who supposedly benefitted from it. Why were these things so powerful in his life, he asked himself? Were they innate in him? Or were they "acquired by us [and] become inveterate by long accustomed use?" Was it, to use a later idiom, nature or nurture? In either event, Cyprian sensed that his lifestyle had been "radically engrained" in him and he felt trapped by it. How, he wondered, "is such a conversion (*conversion*) possible, that there should be a sudden and rapid divestment" of these things which he found so addictive? The answer for Cyprian, as for Justin, lay in an empowering experience mediated through ritual. Cyprian does not tell us about the baptismal rite, but he is eloquent about its effects in his life. "The help of the water of new birth" washed away the stains of his former sins; a light from above was "infused into my reconciled heart"; and the Holy Spirit breathed from heaven restored him and made him a new man. Immersion in water and affusion of Spirit led to a transformation of behavior. As a result, change seemed possible: "in a wondrous manner," he wrote, "doubtful things at once began to assure themselves to me.... [W]hat before had seemed difficult began to suggest a means of accomplishment, what had been thought impossible, to be capable of being achieved."

But by what process – evangelistic, catechetical, and ritual – had Cyprian come to the liberating experience of baptism? The church order known as the *Apostolic Tradition* may provide us with some clues.[9] Scholars at the moment are engaged in a thoroughgoing reevaluation of this complex document.[10] As a result, we can no longer easily accept its attribution to Hippolytus of Rome; nor can we believe that it, as available to us in texts "reconstituted" by scholars, represents a document actually available to any given Christian community in the early third century. Instead, the *Apostolic Tradition* was apparently written by many hands over many years in several places. But, according to Paul Bradshaw, there is a substantial Roman core to its materials about initiation; and to these Roman materials North African materials may have been added.[11] The *Apostolic Tradition* thus very possibly described the general shape of the church's initiatory practices in Carthage in the mid-240s, at the very period when Cyprian was taking steps toward conversion. And known aspects of Cyprian's life would seem to fit with these.

For example, the *Apostolic Tradition* requires that there be, for each candidate, a friend who brings him or her for examination and potential admission to the catechumenate; in Cyprian's case, according to Pontius's *Vita Cypriani*, "the friend and comrade of his soul" is Caecilianus (2.4). A second

example: In the scrutiny of crafts and professions which ensues, the *Apostolic Tradition* advises the catechists not to admit various categories of people for teaching: brothel-keepers, for example, and gladiators, and soldiers who kill. They were not "capable of hearing the word." The document went on:

> He who has the power of the sword, or is a magistrate of a city
> who wears the purple, let him cease or be rejected.

The Arabic manuscript goes even further, repudiating purple clothing that is not related to the magistracy.

Three times in *Ad Donatum* Cyprian refers to his understandable attraction to the purple. Purple-dyed cloth was "the most long-lived status symbol of antiquity"; it was immensely expensive, and only a tiny minority could afford it.[12] It was also much admired for its beauty; Cyprian referred to people who "glittered in their purple." And of course, as Cyprian noted, it was also associated with power and the magisterial office. All of this Cyprian found attractive and yet dangerously seductive; for him it had, he observed, the "appearance of smiling wickedness."[13] Somehow, the *Vita Cypriani* reports, as a Christian Cyprian broke with this attraction; it described his dress as "subdued to a fitting mean."[14] Why was Cyprian so concerned about sartorial ostentation? Was he reflecting a pattern of Stoic and Cynic social criticism? Or possibly an already well-established Christian tradition in which simplicity of attire was a characteristic of a community that sought to practice justice?[15] A third example. The *Apostolic Tradition* stipulates a three-year catechumenate (shortenable in the case of the candidate's keenness and perseverance); during this time he or she will learn to behave like Christians, so that at the end of their catechumenate they can withstand examination. And these are the topics of their examination:

> [H]ave they lived good lives when they were catechumens?
> Have they honored the widows? Have they visited the sick?
> Have they done every kind of good work?

If their recommending friends could say of each, "He (or she) has," then they could proceed to "hear the gospel," i.e. to receive the instruction in Christian belief that immediately preceded baptism. In Cyprian's case, the *Vita Cypriani* reported that his progress was rapid – "more by faith than by time"- and that as a catechumen he had "loved the poor" and given the proceeds of the sale of his estates for their benefit.[16] Of course, Cyprian reported that he found it a struggle to experience the inner transformation which underlay the changes in his behavior; hence, apparently throughout his catechumenate, he wrestled with inner drives and compulsions. And if we are to trust his account in *Ad Donatum*, his wrestling only ceased when, in the waters of baptism, he experienced "power from God" and was incorporated into a new people who would support him in an alternative lifestyle.[17]

What had Cyprian been taught while he was a catechumen? We of course cannot know. But a significant and little-studied document, Cyprian's *Ad Quirinum*, may help us to say what Cyprian thought ought to be on the agenda

for catechists and catechumens. In response to a request from a certain Quirinus, who may have been a catechist, Cyprian compiled three books of precepts, each buttressed by an at times lengthy string of biblical references.[18] The first book dealt with salvation history (especially the Christian church's relationship to Judaism), the second with Christology. The third book, which was more than twice as long as the other two put together, was more practical. It provided "certain precepts of the Lord, and divine teachings" which related to "the religious teaching of our school." Cyprian hoped this would be "easy and useful." This document is not, Professor Ferguson to the contrary, "mostly negative"; only a third of its 120 entries are stated as things the believers "ought not" to do.[19] Nor are the entries, *pace* R. Weber, mostly "moral precepts."[20] Instead, the 120 precepts, each supported by biblical texts, had to do with those things which enabled the Christian churches to flourish as communities marked by distinctive forms of belief, belonging and behavior. Forty-eight of Book III's 120 precepts emphasized belief. Precept 10: "We must trust in God only, and in him we must glory." Another precept assured the believers that they were secure, in a world of ominous plague and persecution, for God provides resurrection. Therefore "no one should be made sad by death" – and, by implication, every Christian could take risks of obedience. (3.58) For Cyprian the Eucharist was central to the community's worship; it was "to be received with fear and honor." But what really mattered to Cyprian about the community's beliefs and sacraments was how they affected the community's practice: "it is of small account to be baptized and to receive the Eucharist," according to precept 26, "unless one profit by it both in deeds and works." What the community believed mattered, not least because it affected how the community behaved. If belief was important to Cyprian, so also was belonging. Cyprian in many precepts sought to catechize a community which would have a strong sense of shared identity. He used familial language, and emphasized that the family was to be interdependent: "Brethren ought to support one another." (3.9) Cyprian assumed that the supportive, interdependent community would be socially distinctive: in several precepts he emphasized that "the believer ought not to live like the Gentile." (3.34) But although Cyprian's precepts dealt with both belief and belonging, the greatest proportion of them had to do with behavior, with how the Christians should live. Cyprian wanted the believers to relate creatively to non-Christians. Christians were to pay just wages and not take usury (81, 48). When they were wounded, they were not to retaliate; they were also not to go to law (23, 44). Intriguingly, nowhere in the 120 precepts does Cyprian urge the Christians to speak to non-Christians about their faith. Did he think this was too dangerous? Or that the Christians' distinctive lifestyle would be more eloquent than words? At any rate, the bulk of the precepts of *Ad Quirinum* have to do with how Christians should behave to each other. So Cyprian dealt with good speech, anger, the importance of mutual correction, and good relationships within households. Cyprian, we are unsurprised to note, had a high view of leadership: "we must rise when a bishop or a presbyter comes." (3.85) But he cautioned "that those are more severely judged, who in this world have had more power." (3.112) Cyprian wanted the believers to experience, within the framework of a viable and sustainable community, a life free of the

forms of bondage he had known. In view of his own struggles, it is understandable that Cyprian dealt with simplicity of food, the dangers of acquisitiveness, and the lures of luxurious living. (3.60, 61, 36) Is the order of the 120 precepts significant, we might wonder? Not in general, I believe; but it cannot be accidental that his first precept has to do with "good works and mercy" which expressed themselves in economic redistribution, for this precept had been a conversion issue for Cyprian. Its 33 supportive biblical texts showed the depth of his own study and engagement. The Christian community, as Cyprian later put it, was an "enclosed garden," a network of relationships in which people were flourishing in a kind of freedom that had eluded him as a pagan, but which he now believed was possible in Christ.[21] Indeed, the aim of *Ad Quirinum*, like so much in Cyprian's writings, was to enable people to be changed, converted, into Christians. As Simone Deléani has argued, "following Christ" was central to Cyprian's spirituality.[22] So it is precept 39 that gives cohesion to the common life of the Carthaginian Christians; "there is given to us an example of living in Christ."

So far we have examined two samples of early Christianity – the conversion stories of Justin and Cyprian. Both of these have demonstrated the centrality of conversion to the life and recruitment of the Christian communities. We have seen that conversion had three ingredients – belief, behavior, and belonging,[23] and that common to them all was the reality of *change*. *Epistrophe*, *metanoia*, *conversion* – all of these words connoted turning and change.[24] This was more than intellectual change; for the early Christian writers it was life-encompassing. For Justin, conversion satisfied his longing for truth and peoplehood, as well as his desire to be freed from the demonic conventionalities of second-century life. For Cyprian *conversion* entailed a transformation of inner disposition and outer custom.[25] Thus, conversion was bound to challenge more than a person's mental ruts or philosophical categories; it was bound to be more than a *Glaubenswechsel* or a "reorientation of the soul of an individual."[26] Indeed the change in belief often was quite secondary to the change in behavior. As we look at the events, often recorded by an elite to be sure but involving ordinary people, we discover a familiar pattern. People were first attracted to the Christians, not by their ideas, but by their distinctive behavior and/or by the mysterious spiritual powers that seemed to be among them.[27] Only later, when it was clear that these potential recruits were ready to try to share in this lifestyle, were they deemed ready to be taught the doctrines of the community; and only later still could they in any meaningful sense be viewed as "converted."

But is it sufficient to view conversion in terms of multidimensional change? Ramsay MacMullen of Yale has recently pointed to the function of experience in conversion. Conversion for the early Christians, he has written, was "that experience by which nonbelievers first became convinced that the Christian God was almighty, and that they must please Him."[28] MacMullen is right to point to the dimension of experience; as we have noted, both Justin and Cyprian reported a clarifying, even cathartic dimension at some point within their journeys of conversion. MacMullen has also been helpful in pointing to the manifestations of spiritual power – whether in healings or exorcisms – which contemporaries claimed had drawn them to consider adhering to Christianity.

One example which I have recently found comes from Jerusalem in the early 240s. Origen was in full flight, catechizing some would-be Christians about 1 Samuel. Suddenly, when he uttered Hannah's words, "My heart has exulted in the Lord," there was a scream, and a person with "an impure spirit" fell to the ground. Origen continued to repeat, evidently mantra-like, "My heart has exulted in the Lord," while exorcists gathered round and delivered the sufferer from his misery. Origen then commented, "Things like this lead many people to be converted to God...many to come to faith." (Hom on Sam 1.10)

But Origen, we may note, said that such experiences lead to conversion; he did not claim that they constituted the conversion. Indeed, no Christian leader of the early centuries would have claimed that. The early Christians, as Cyprian makes clear, saw conversion in terms of life-encompassing change which was mediated through a catechetical and ritual process. Experience could be vital in the conversion process in several ways: (1) as the source of a person's initial interest in the faith; (2) as a confirmation of the Christian God's presence and power midway through the process, as in the Origen incident I just recounted; or (3) at the at the climax of the process in the exorcism and immersion of the baptismal rite, which seems to have been designed to affect an experience for the baptizand that would be unforgettable, "awe-inspiring," as it was in Cyprian's case.

Cyprian and Origen, of course, stand midway through the third century. This was the century in which the church's growth, which had been rapid from its inception, really became visible.[29] By the early fourth century the proportion of Christians in the empire approached 10 per cent – and of course in certain areas the percentage of Christians would have been much higher than that. As the numbers increased, did the new converts continue to manifest the change that we have seen as central to conversion – change in belief, belonging and behavior? Did they continue to be "resocialized" into new and distinctively Christian forms of community and conduct as a result of the catechetical and ritual processes that were by now well developed? Or was this a period, not so much of "resocialization" as of relaxation – of blurring the community's boundaries and conventionalizing the Christians' behavior?[30] Much evidence indicates that Christianity was indeed settling down in the third century; but there is other evidence that indicates that the traditional patterns continued – for example, as manifested in the "conversion" of the emperor Constantine.

As I have already said, Constantine's pre-battle dream of October 312 led to victory under the "cypher of Christ."[31] Inspired by what he took to be a vindication of religious experience by historical event, Constantine summoned "those who were acquainted with the mysteries of [God's] doctrines" to inquire what the vision might mean and to find out more about the Christian God. These people apparently instructed Constantine briefly in Christian matters. But, as Pierre Batiffol argued as early as 1913, he seems not to have become a catechumen.[32] Constantine admitted Christian priests as members of his entourage. But instead of being formally catechized, Constantine decided to "to devote himself to the reading of the inspired writings" on his own.[33]

So was Constantine at this point converted? Constantine proceeded in the Edict of Milan to give Christianity a position of privileged equality with

other religions. He adopted "the victorious trophy, the salutary symbol" as his insignia for battle.[34] In numerous acts, especially after his victory over Licinius in 324, Constantine acted to promote the welfare of Christianity as he understood it: his acts of patronage and privilege, coupled with a selective despoiling of pagan shrines, are well known. Constantine mingled with Christian bishops, and he presided at a great ecumenical council. But a careful reading of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* raises the possibility that Constantine – until the very end of his life – never felt that he belonged in the Christian community. Indications of this are his activities, according to Eusebius, on Sundays and Easter. On Sundays he would not be at a Eucharist with other Christians; instead, he would "seclude himself daily at a stated hour in the innermost chambers of his palace ... in solitary converse with his God." On Easter he didn't celebrate the feast by joining with the throngs of the faithful in the vigil; instead he ordered immense wax tapers to be lighted throughout the city.[35] His *Oration to the Assembly of Saints*, which may date from Good Friday 325,[36] reinforces the impression that Constantine sensed that he did not belong. In this *Oration*, Constantine discourses upon matters of Christian truth in ways that have impressed some historians. But repeatedly, we may note, Constantine contrasted himself as an outsider to his audience of saints and initiates: "We...have received no aid from human instruction; nay, whatever graces of character are esteemed of good report... are entirely the gift of God." Or again, "Compare our religion with your own. Is there not with us genuine concord, and unwearied love of others?"[37] Constantine's defensiveness was manifest. Even though uncatechized, even though unbaptized, even though unable to darken a church's door, "surely all men know that the holy service in which these hands have been employed has originated in pure and genuine faith towards God."[38]

It is not fully clear why Constantine waited to become a catechumen until the last months of his life. Was it the decision of the bishops, who had been willing to sit at his table, accept his subsidies and use his authority, but who had to refuse him because they – given the teachings and traditions of the church – could not accept someone whose behavior was so permeated by violence and luxury? Or was it Constantine's decision to resist catechism and baptism? If the latter, how much had Constantine reflected on the situation? It is possible, but improbable, that Constantine wanted to play it both ways and remain amphibiously pagan as well as Christian; his progression toward Christian adherence seems erratic but genuine. Nevertheless Constantine (according to Eusebius) had *amphibolia* – he was hesitant, of two minds.[39] Consider what it would have meant for an emperor to become a catechumen. It would have meant, according to well-established tradition, a scrutiny of his lifestyle; hardly a nonviolent soul, Constantine may have heard, perhaps from the churchmen themselves, that the Christians required a person who "has the power of the sword, or is a magistrate of a city who wears the purple," to cease or be rejected.[40] For reasons of imperial responsibility Constantine may not have wanted to be baptized. Furthermore, Constantine as a catechumen would have to submit his independent theological judgement (so evident in his *Oration to the Assembly*) to the instruction of others. And he may have been a bit afraid of the mysterious elements of Christian initiation. Many Christian communities were

not free to discuss the rite and meaning of baptism before outsiders. But Constantine may have heard rumors about the exorcisms: did he want some cleric to hiss imprecatory words in his face? The threefold baptismal immersions were more than symbolically life-threatening; was it responsible for an emperor to submit to a rite in which someone might hold him under? And the whole ritual was designed to be leveling – to treat patrician and plebeian alike.[41] Furthermore, there was the unsmiling Christian attitude to post-baptismal sin. Constantine may simply have wanted to avoid depriving himself, as emperor, of recourse to actions that many Christian communities persisted in viewing as sinful. There were good reasons why Constantine, as well as the bishops, might have resisted baptism.

Nevertheless, when facing death, Constantine demonstrated that he believed in the God of the Christians. Although he held out as long as possible, as he claimed, so he could imitate Christ by being baptized in the Jordan,[42] Constantine had only got as far as Bithynia when he realized that his health was dangerously uncertain. Therefore he decided to seek purification "from any errors which he might ever have committed... by the power of the secret words and the saving washing."[43] Constantine confessed his sins, and then "for the first time" received the imposition of hands and prayer. Thereby, as Edward Yarnold has recently argued, Constantine became a catechumen.[44] Shortly thereafter Constantine expressed the desire to "be numbered henceforth among the flock of the people of God," so that he could "share within the congregation in the prayers alongside all the others...." The emperor wanted to belong to the Christian community. In addition, Constantine promised to change his lifestyle: "I shall now impose upon myself rules of life which are worthy of God." Having made this promise, he underwent the initiatory procedures "in the usual manner." He received "all the necessary injunctions" (about behavior as well as belief?). He was baptized, and was "reborn." Whereupon, Eusebius reports, thirty years after the experience of his momentous dream, Constantine had a second experience. Its power evidently surprised him:

> "[Constantine] rejoiced in the spirit, was renewed and filled with divine light, delighting in his soul through the excess of faith, and astonished at the clear manifestation of the divine power."

Henceforth Constantine, in the few days remaining to him, behaved differently, "having resolved never to come in contact with purple again." "*Now*," he exulted shortly before he died, "in truth I know myself to be blessed." At last Constantine was converted.

But not for long. Within several weeks of his baptism Constantine died, and imperial conventions reasserted themselves. Soldiers lifted his corpse, laid it in a golden casket, and swathed the casket in purple cloth. After embalming the body, courtiers displayed it in the imperial palace "arrayed in the symbols of sovereignty, the diadem and the purple robe."[45] Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, as Christian emperors succeeded each other, there was a "standardization of the use of purple in the imperial insignia."[46] In the same era,

purple was also gradually adopted as a distinctive attire for the upper clergy.[47] Of course, this was also the time of the decisive growth of Christianity in numbers and influence. Constantine may have given Christianity a position of privileged equality among the empire's religions, but he had repudiated coercion. He was unwilling, as he put it, to compel people "to undertake the conflict for immortality... from the fear of punishment."[48] Under Constantine's successors, however, "the carrot and the stick" did much to further the church's growth.[49] Career advancement and governmental largesse worked together to secure the conversion, not least, of the imperial aristocracy; imperial laws of 408 and 416 barred the imperial civil service to any but baptized Christians. This inducement was supplemented by compulsion; a law of 392 made Christian worship the only legal public cult in the empire, and there were numerous local campaigns of temple destruction. Not until 529, under Justinian I, was Christian conversion made obligatory – under threat of swingeing penalties. But well before this what Peter Brown has called "respectable Christianity"[50] had become the religion whose tentacles one could perhaps avoid in the countryside but which, in the cities, especially for people of prominence, were unavoidable. Christian conversion in this post-Constantine society no longer involved a "resocialization" into the values of a deviant community; it now involved a mopping-up operation, inducing and compelling now-deviant pagans to conform themselves to the now-normal norms of a Christian society.[51] In this setting it took much more risk and daring to avoid Christian conversion than it did to become a Christian; not surprisingly, as time progressed, the catechism and then the rites of initiation of the Christian church became progressively formalized and truncated.

An interesting sample of conversion in this period is the experience of Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus (Volusian).[52] Volusian was a member of the illustrious Caeonii family of Rome; in it, a growing number – including Melania the older and Melania the younger – were Christians. But despite the best efforts of the family's women, Volusian, like others of the family's men, resisted conversion. In 411-412 Volusian was sent to Africa as proconsul, whereupon the elder Melania wrote to a circle of prominent Christians in Carthage urging them to befriend him. So the tribune Marcellinus and others saw him daily; and from Hippo Augustine corresponded with him with seriousness and respect.[53] From the Carthage group we get a picture of Volusian's hesitations about Christianity, hesitations which probably were typical of Roman aristocrats of his circle. Volusian found the beliefs of Christianity to be problematic; the incarnation and miracles were hard to comprehend. More seriously for a Roman aristocrat, Volusian was convinced that the behavior which the Christians taught, for example that believers should not return evil for evil, was "not adaptable to the customs of the state."[54] Nonviolence and nonretaliation were, from his vantage point, politically incorrect. Augustine replied to Volusian directly in letters to him and at greater length indirectly via letters to Marcellinus, addressing Volusian's theological and practical concerns. Volusian, Augustine argued, would have to submit to Christian beliefs if he wanted to become a Christian. But no one would challenge him, unlike Cyprian a century and a half earlier, to change the

behavior characteristic of Roman patricians. The teachings of Jesus which were problematic for Volusian, according to Augustine, referred to the "interior dispositions of the heart" rather than to public morality; the behavior of Christian rulers would be governed by "a sort of kindly harshness" in the interest of the welfare of others. It is in kindness that the good are obliged to wage war to restrain licentious behavior; and the Christian gospel sanctions this in John the Baptist's instructions to the soldiers: as Augustine pointed out, John does not tell them to throw down their weapons, but rather to avoid gratuitous violence and to be content with their wages (Luke 3.14). Volusian had heard rumors that the Christian faith was inimical to public order. On the contrary, Augustine asserted, Christianity made for "the greatest safety of the state." For someone as "distinguished and excellent" as Volusian, conversion would not require a change in aristocratic behavior.[55]

Even so, Volusian resisted conversion. We next meet him twenty-three years later, in 436. In that year, according to our source, Gerontius's *Life of Melania the Younger*, the ageing Volusian – still a pagan – was sent as an ambassador of the Roman court to Constantinople. His job: to arrange the marriage of the Western emperor Valentinian III to the Eastern princess Eudoxia. From her monastic community near Jerusalem, Volusian's niece – the younger Melania – heard of his journey eastwards. So she hurried to Constantinople to see her uncle and to try yet again to convert him.[56] They had an emotional reunion, in which Melania immediately came to the point – she begged her uncle to "approach the bath of immortality" to gain "eternal goods" and avoid "eternal fire." She also referred to imperial legislation of 408 and 416,[57] and threatened to report him to Theodosius II as a civil servant who was obdurate in his paganism. Volusian was exasperated and troubled. He was ready, he said, to wash away the stain of his unspecified "many errors." However, he begged Melania not to take from him "the gift of self-determination" which God had given him. If he came to baptism as a result of the emperor's command, he would be capitulating to coercion. And, in his view, he would thereby "lose the reward of my free decision." So Melania backed off, and tried to secure Volusian's *willing* conversion. At her behest, the persuasive patriarch Proclus came to talk to Volusian about his salvation; at some unspecified time he was made a catechumen; and when his health took a turn for the worse, Volusian was baptized a few hours before his death. Persistence, persuasion, changing social convention, the threat of force and impending death had finally conquered him. And what about Volusian's baptismal experience, which had been so important to Cyprian and evidently also to Constantine? Perhaps it is no accident that Gerontius, unlike Eusebius, says nothing about it. Nevertheless, Melania rejoiced, for the entire family of the Caeionii was Christian. A century earlier, in Constantine's baptism, the Church had required the emperor to change his lifestyle; in Volusian's baptism – whether in Augustine's correspondence or Melania's maneuverings – there is no hint that conversion required a respectable aristocrat to change – in his attitude to violence, or apparently in the opulence or color of his dress. In this his experience was typical. As Rita Lizzi has pointed out, "In order to encourage the conversion of the wealthier citizens, the bishops modulated their preaching, dealing in an appropriate fashion with the topics of wealth and alms-giving."[58] The result, in the words of Peter Brown, was "a respectable, aristocratic Christianity."[59] And it was now these converted aristocrats who used their kudos and their clout to secure the conversion of their at times uncooperative underlings.[60] Thus the Christianization of Europe proceeded, and the conversion cake had become a different thing altogether. Without the spiritual equivalent of a rising agent it had become flat – not a cake but a crêpe.

From Justin in Rome to Volusian in Constantinople we have traveled many miles and many years in our historical review. I would like, in conclusion, to make two observations about what we have seen en route. In the first place, we have looked at conversion in a very limited way, through the experiences of articulate and wealthy men.[61] Justin and Cyprian both, in their backgrounds and in the audiences for which they wrote, were signs of a tendency that had been noticeable from Christianity's earliest days. Members of the urban upper crust were open to the Christian good news. Scholars have been making this point for the past two decades or so: Christianity was not just a movement of the dispossessed but was a movement open to all social classes in which upper-class people often played special leadership roles. There is much that is valuable in this approach. But our evidence would remind us of one thing which I would add as a proviso: the Church required the members of the urban elite, and even of the imperial aristocracy, who were drawn to Christianity to change. Belief, belonging and behavior – all of these were ingredients in the conversion of upper-class Greco-Romans. They now, after conversion, believed things which to other upper-class people seemed eccentric. They now belonged to a new social entity in which they mingled with large numbers of poorer people. They now behaved in new ways, ways that expressed a transformed social vision rooted in the teachings of Jesus and that resulted in new forms of action in relation to wealth, violence, power and poor people. Evidence of this is provided not only in the testimonies of Justin and Cyprian – and not only in the *Apostolic Tradition* and Cyprian's remarkable agenda for catechesis in his *Ad Quirinum*. It is also found in the story of Constantine's conversion, in which the sheer durability of the early Church's commitment to change, even in the face of the potential conversion of an emperor, is evident. This cannot have been easy for Constantine; and several documents prove that many early Christians had comparable struggles. If we look at nothing more than the writings of Cyprian we will find illustrations of Christians who, to his manifest disapproval, lapsed into indulgence in luxury and who were reluctant to share their wealth.[62] An experience of God's power and presence, especially in baptism, could be a means of enabling a change in values; however, even though the church continued to insist on it even into the fourth century, such conversion was obviously not indelible.

Second, as we have traveled across the centuries we have noticed a change in conversion. Belief, behavior and belonging – these were present as ingredients in Volusian's conversion just as they were in Cyprian's. But the emphases have shifted. Guided by the patriarch Proclus, Volusian was invited to assent to Christian beliefs. But at no point – from Augustine in Volusian's early adulthood to Proclus in his final days – is there an indication that the Church

required this Roman aristocrat to query his social priorities or to change his behavior in light of Cyprian's criterion – the "example of living in Christ." To be sure, in Volusian's conversion there is an emphasis upon belonging: but it is a belonging to his family's religion which is his class's religion, indeed the empire's religion; and it is a belonging which is now associated with compulsion. Volusian, his arm being twisted behind him, was being asked to ratify a social order, not to query it; to swim in the mainstream, not in a crosscurrent. Volusian, at his life's end, said yes.

Historians may describe this development. And scholars who think about Christianity and culture may evaluate it. Traditionally they would have done so in the categories of Ernst Troeltsch: from sect into church. Or in the categories of Richard Niebuhr: from a Christ who was "against culture" to a Christ who was at least "above culture" and at best who "transforms culture." Contemporary missiological discussion, on the other hand, has to do with the necessity of the "contextualization" or "inculturation" of the Christian message, with the attendant dangers, which must be monitored, of "syncretism" and "uncritical symbiosis."[63] The pattern of conversion that is evident in the centuries following Constantine is typified by Volusian's recruitment to the Christian faith. This enabled the triumph of Christianity among the Roman aristocrats and thus the triumph of Christian civilization as we have known it in the West. But as Christendom is crumbling around us, perhaps it is time to listen to other parts of the church's story – for example, to the understandings, patterns and rituals of conversion that were precious and life-changing to Cyprian, and which Cyprian would have claimed were directly related to what he called "following Christ."

Notes

1. For an expansion of the argument of this article, first presented as a lecture on 12 March 1997 in the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, Regent's Park College, Oxford, see Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origins of Christendom* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

2. Lactantius, *Mort Pers* 44.4-6. Cf Eusebius, *VC* 1.29-31.

3. T.D. Barnes, "The Constantinian Reformation." In *The Crake Lectures, 1984*: A Classical Symposium held September 27-28 in conjunction with the opening of the Crake Reading Room, Mount Allison University, 39-58. Sackville, N.B.: Crake Institute, 1986, 46. Both Barnes and Paul Keresztes have emphasized that Constantine's conversion really began before the events of 312: Barnes, "The Conversion of Constantine." *Classical Views* n.s., 4 (1985), 372; Keresztes, "The Phenomenon of Constantine the Great's Conversion." *Augustinianum* 27 (1987), 88.

4. Henry Chadwick, "Conversion in Constantine the Great." In *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian*, ed. Derek Baker. 1-13. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978.

5. Jakob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956, 24.

6. Cf. Eugene V. Gallagher, *Expectation and Experience: Explaining Religious Conversion*, Ventures in Religion, 1 (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1990), 120, who discerned in Justin's conversion "cosmic, moral, and social dimensions."

7. Pontius, *Vita Cypriani*, 4.

8. Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 3.

9. For editions, see Gregory Dix, ed., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome*, rev Henry Chadwick (London, SPCK, 1968); Bernard Botte, ed., *La Tradition apostolique de Saint Hippolyte: Essai de reconstitution*, 5th ed (Münster, Aschendorff, 1989). I have used the English version of G.J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students*, Grove Liturgical Study, 8, rev ed (Bramcote, Notts, Grove Books, 1987).

10. For recent interpretations, with varying views on location and date, see Thomas M. Finn, "Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 3 (1989), 69; Marcel Metzger, "Nouvelles perspectives pour la prétendue Tradition apostolique," *Ecclesia Orans* 5 (1988), 241-259; idem, "Enquêtes autour de la prétendue 'Tradition apostolique'," *Ecclesia Orans* 9 (1992), 7-36; Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (London, SPCK, 1992), 89-92; Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension Before the Emergence of a Monarch Bishop*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christanae*, 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

11. For a summary of Professor Bradshaw's current views, see Maxwell E. Johnson, "The Postchrismational Structure of Apostolic Tradition 21, the Witness of Ambrose of Milan, and a Tentative Hypothesis Regarding the Current Reform of Confirmation in the Roman Rite," *Worship* 70 (1996), 21-23.

12. Meyer Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Late Antiquity*. Vol. 116. Collection Latomus, Brussels: Latomus, 1970, 6, 53.

13. Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 2.11.

14. Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 6. *Acta Cypriani* 5 (Musurillo, 175) describes the simplicity of his clothing at the time of his execution.

15. Reinhold, 56; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 31.6; Tertullian, *De Idol* 18.

16. Pontius, *Vita Cypriani* 2, 3, 6.

17. Cyprian, *Ad Donatum* 4.

18. Antonio Quacquarelli, "Note retoriche sui Testimonia di Cipriano." *Vetera Christianorum* 8 (1971), 204.

19. Everett Ferguson, "Catechesis and Initiation," in Alan Kreider, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2001), 229-268).

20. R. Weber, ed., *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera* I, CCSL 3, I (Turnhout: Brepols, 1972), liii.

21. Cyprian, *Ep* 73 (74).11; Firmilian of Neocaesarea, in Cyprian, *Ep* 74(75).15, quoting Cyprian on this theme.

22. Simone Deleani, *Christum sequi: Etude d'un theme dans l'oeuvre de saint Cyprien*. Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1979, 13-15.

23. Cf Gallagher, *Expectation and Experience*, 120.

24. On *epistrophe*, see Paul Aubin, *Le problème de la 'conversion'*, Théologie historique, 1 (Paris, Beauchesne, 1963).

25. Cyprian, *Ad Donatum,* 3.

26. Kurt Aland, *Über den Glaubenswechsel in der Geschichte des Christentums* (Berlin, Töpelmann, 1961); Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933), 7.

27. Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom*. Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Studies, 32, Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd, 1995.

28. Ramsay MacMullen, "Two Types of Conversion to Early Christianity." *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983), 184; idem, "Conversion: A Historian's View." *Second Century* 5 (1985-1986), 67-81.

29. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, cap 1.

30. For conversion as "resocialization," see Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

31. Lactantius, *Mort Pers,* 44.4-6. Cf the more elaborate, and much later, account of Eusebius, *VC*, 1.29-31. For comment on the dream/vision accounts, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Constantine* (London, Croom Helm, 1969), 72-78.

32. Pierre Batiffol, "Les Etapes de la conversion de Constantin," *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétienne* 3 (1913), 264. F.J. Dölger,"Die Taufe Konstantins und ihre Probleme," in idem, *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit* (Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1913), 439, unconvincingly to my view, saw Constantine as a "hearer."

33. Eusebius, *VC,* 1.32. I have based the rest of my account on this text, aware of its limitations and yet confident that it is "inherently plausible" (T.D. Barnes, "Panegyric, History and Hagiography in Eusebius' Life of Constantine," in Rowan Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 91-123, esp 114-115. See also Friedhelm Winkelmann, "Zur Geschichte des Authentitätsproblems der Vita Constantini," *Klio* 40 (1962), 187-243; Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1986), 627.

34. Eusebius, *VC*, 1.37.

35. *VC,* 4.22. Cf the Pentecost of 337 following his baptism, of which Eusebius (*VC,* 4.64) remarked that "the Emperor was admitted to all these rites."

36. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians,* 643.

37. *Oration,* 11, 23.

38. Ibid., 26.

39. Eusebius, *VC,* 4.62; Dölger, "Die Taufe Konstantins," 426.

40. On Christian repudiation of the purple, see *AT,* 16; Minucius Felix, *Oct,* 31.6; Cyprian, *Ad Don,* 3. On the mistrust of the magistracy, see the early fourth-century Canons of Elvira, c 56: "A magistrate is ordered to keep away from the church during the one year of his term as *duumvir*."

41. Cf John Chrysostom, writing half a century after Constantin's initiation, on exorcism (*Bapt Instr,* 2.13): "[T]his rite does away with all difference and distinction of rank. Even if a man happens to enjoy worldly honor, if he happens to glitter with wealth, if he boasts of high lineage or the glory which is his in this world, he stands side by side with the beggar.... See what profit these words and these awesome and wonderful invocations bring with them."

42. This was not the only way in which Constantine pursued an *imitatio Christi*. As Rudolf Leeb has demonstrated, Constantine modestly adopted the device of the victorious Christ treading on the serpent for his imperial iconography; thereby, on his new palace in Constantinople, he and his sons were depicted as carrying on Christ's work of subduing evil (Eusebius, *VC* 3.3). "Inasmuch as Constantine overcomes the evil in the world, he is the fulfiller of the will of the Christ God, who therefore helps him" (*Konstantin und Christus: Die Verchristlichung der imperialen Repraesentation unter Konstantin den Grossen als Spiegel seiner Kirchenpolitik und seines Selbstverständnisses als christlicher Kaiser*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte, 58 [Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1992], 49-52); Eusebius, *VC,* 3.3.

43. This account is based on Eusebius, *VC,* 4.61-62. I use the translation of E.J. Yarnold, "The Baptism of Constantine," *Studia Patristica* 26 (1993), 95-96.

44. Yarnold, "The Baptism of Constantine," 98.

45. Eusebius, *VC* 4.66.

46. Reinhold, *History of Purple* 62.

47. Ibid., 68, 73.

48. Eusebius, *VC* 2.60.

49. Michele Renee Salzman. "'Superstitio' in the Codex Theodosianus and the Persecution of Pagans." *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987): 172-188.

50. Peter Brown, "Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy," in his *Religion and Society*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972, 164, 168, 178.

51. Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 21, 162.

52. For Volusian's genealogy and career, see André Chastagnol, "Le Sénateur Volusien et la conversion d'une famille de l'aristocratie romaine au bas-empire," *Revue des études anciennes* (1956), 241-253; idem, *Les Fastes de la Préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire*, Etudes Prosopographiques, 2 (Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1962), 276-279; Elizabeth A. Clark, The *Life of Melania the Younger*, Studies in Women and Religion, 14 (Lewiston, N.Y., Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 129-133.

53. Marcellinus to Augustine (Augustine, *Ep,* 136); Volusian to Augustine (Augustine, *Ep,* 135); Augustine to Volusian (*Epp,* 132, 137).

54. Augustine, *Epp,* 135-136.

55. Augustine, *Epp,* 137-138. Cf Rita Lizzi's observation based on Northern Italy: "In order to encourage the conversion of the wealthier citizens, the bishops modulated their preaching, dealing in an appropriate fashion with the topics of wealth and alms-giving" ("Ambrose's Contemporaries and the Christianization of Northern Italy," *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 [1980], 167).

56. The best source for this is Gerontius, *The Life of Melania the Younger,* 51-55.

57. *CT,* 16.5.42; 16.19.21.

58. Lizzi, "Ambrose's Contemporaries," 167.

59. For the Christian conviction that conversion might require Christians to leave governmental service, see Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or,* 40.19; also Council of Arles (314), c 7, which stipulated that governors who were Christians and involved in administration should be "watched over by the bishop of the place, and that, if they happen to commit acts contrary to the [ecclesiastical] discipline, then only should they be excluded from communion." For the Christianized Roman aristocracy, see Brown, "Aspects of the Christianization," 177.

60. Augustine, *Enarr in Ps* 54.13; *CD* 19.14; John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364-425* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975), 155-156.

61. For reflections on the conversions of women, see Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 12-14; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

62. Cyprian, *De Eleemosynis et Operibus*; *De Lapsis* 5-6.

63. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988, 12.

Is Conversion Becoming Marginalized as a Central Goal of Christian Mission and Evangelism?

An Examination of Some Factors Which Threaten the Centrality of Conversion, Especially the Acceptance of Interfaith or Interreligious Dialogue as a Replacement for Conversion

James A. Scherer

I. Introduction: The New Context of Religious Pluralism

The main theme of this essay is that *conversion* – the conversion of persons or groups to faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ – remains and *must remain* a central goal and an irreplaceable part of Christian mission and evangelism. In our twenty-first century world of religious pluralism, however, conversion as the historic goal of mission and evangelism is increasingly being threatened by various factors, some of long standing, but others of more recent origin. The practice of conversion is increasingly being marginalized. Obstacles to conversion are both theological and nontheological. In the global context of religious pluralism, conversion to Christianity – never easy in the past – is today becoming even more difficult, controversial and dangerous. This is particularly true in the Two-Thirds World and in situations where Christians form only a tiny minority of the general population.

Often there is no protection for a would-be convert, even though freedom to *hold* a religious belief publicly and to *change* one's beliefs is supposedly a universal human right.[1] Both the individuals or groups wishing to convert, or to be converted, and the mission agents or evangelists encouraging such conversions, are likely to face intimidation, harassment, legal penalties,

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and in extreme cases, even death. In the past five years a growing number of Western missionaries have been murdered.[2] National Christian workers have been attacked and killed. Christian congregations have been invaded and ransacked, and houses of worship have been torched. In Northern Nigeria and on the Indonesian island of Ambon, ethnic rivalries between Christians and Muslims have exploded into violence and death. In Gujarat, India, more than a thousand Muslims were savagely attacked and killed by Hindu fanatics in February and March 2002. In much of the Two-Thirds World, the climate for religious conversion has become hostile and incendiary.

Substantial opposition to Christian conversion also exists in the West, not only within secular humanism but even in Western Christendom. Apart from evangelicals, the Great commission is often dismissed by many Christians as a symbol of the past. The age of foreign mission is said to be over, according to this view, and has now been succeeded by the age of ecumenical relationships, interfaith cooperation and dialogue. Contributing to this view, especially in liberal Christianity, is lingering embarrassment over alleged abuses in the practice of conversion by Christian missions in the post-Constantinian era, particularly in the period of Western imperialism and colonialism. These past abuses are sometimes seen as invalidating further efforts toward conversion today. Belief in toleration by Christians toward people of other faiths, the wish to promote social harmony, and the avoidance of provocation are regarded by some as justifying the abandonment of conversion as a missionary goal. In the case of Eastern Orthodoxy, a tendency to equate all conversions by non-Orthodox with *proselytism* requires that mission groups act with extreme sensitivity and circumspection lest they be accused of engaging in proselytism. Despite this dismissive cultural attitude toward conversion in the West, except for evangelicalism, few serious obstacles face the would-be convert.

The situation is different in the Two-Thirds World, where massive objection to Christian conversion exists, especially among Hindus and Muslims, and both legal and administrative measures are used to discourage or prevent conversions to Christianity. According to reports by one monitoring group, freedom of religion – including the right to conversion – is subject to "restrictions by law, official policy or action, or societal attitudes."[3] In several countries the law prohibits a change in one's religion, and violators are subject to criminal penalties, including death. Legal restrictions on apostasy may threaten those who wish to change their religious beliefs. In some cases, particular faiths are banned and the practice of these faiths is punishable by law. In certain countries, persons are forced to profess a religion not their own. Importation and distribution of religious literature may be restricted. Conversions can be made more stressful by requiring candidates for conversion to appear publicly before secular courts to seek official recognition for their decision.

Communist countries, while claiming to guarantee religious freedom to their subjects, make use of administrative measures to restrict religious expression by withholding official recognition or registration to particular religious groups. Control over Christian and other religious communities is enforced by requiring official registration based on government criteria and conformity to government policies. Unregistered religious groups or congregations are harassed or closed down. Governments may withhold permits for the building or repair of places of worship. They may restrict the production or distribution of religious literature, control the solicitation of funds and the provision of charitable or humanitarian services. They may also interfere with the free selection of religious leaders. In the People's Republic of China, the government gives encouragement and support to so-called "patriotic" religious organizations which cooperate with the government in matters of registration and support for party political objectives. There appears to be little or no interference in such cases with the conversion of individuals, which continue to take place in growing numbers. But adherence to Christianity brings social penalties.

Can conversion – with baptism and church membership – be preserved as a central and indispensable element of Christian mission? This depends on Christians adhering to and practicing a clear biblical and apostolic model of conversion. Because of historical abuses of conversion, as well as criticisms and objections posed by opponents, the *meaning* of conversion needs to be *clarified*, and its practice *purified*. The age of religious pluralism urgently requires that Christians make a valid case for retaining conversion as an integral part of mission. Taking a united stand on conversion will not immediately remove all objections. But it will give Christian mission groups a firm foundation on which to stand, help to promote a common witness to the gospel and protect local churches and evangelists from unwarranted attacks.

Conversion to Christianity, especially in the Two-Thirds World, is today under attack. It is often equated with "stealing sheep" from another religious community, or simply rejected as an unethical way of recruiting members for one's own religious group. It is seen as a slap in the face and a threat to the religious community from which the sheep are allegedly stolen. Converts are sometimes considered trophies of interreligious or interdenominational competition; they become one measure of the relative success of a group's missionary endeavor, or a mark of its zeal. When so understood, the practice of making converts from other faiths is usually soundly condemned – by secularists, by adherents of other religions, and by Christians alike. It is viewed as a relic of bygone days, a practice no longer approved by the civilized world in an age of toleration. This secular view of conversion is of course a caricature, but it is widely held and leads directly to the widespread denigration of all evangelistic and missionary activity.

Historically, the conversion of persons and groups to faith in Jesus Christ through *persuasion*, and without coercion, has always played a central

role in Christian mission. The theological interpretation and practice of conversion, however, have varied over the centuries. Regrettably, but without question, there have been deplorable abuses of conversion, particularly with regard to the absence of individual freedom or personal choice. But at no time has conversion, joined to baptism, been viewed as less than an indispensable part of Christian mission.

When William Carey (1761-1834) launched the modern Protestant missionary era by challenging the prevalent anti-missionary views of his day, he published an influential treatise entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792). According to a classical seventeenth century definition of mission by Vaduz, an early Dutch missiologist, the first goal of mission should be the "conversion of the nations" (*conversion Pentium)*; the second the "planting of churches" (*plantain ecclesiarum);* and the third and highest "the glory of God" *(*glorificatio *dei).*[4]

Since the time of the apostles, the conversion of persons and groups, rather than mere proclamation of the gospel, or simply performing works of Christian service, has been a central goal of Christian mission. During successive evangelical awakenings, the emphasis on personal conversion was strongly promoted by prominent urban evangelists such as Charles G. Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and more recently Billy Graham. All followed a conscious strategy of issuing an "altar call" and encouraging seekers to accept Christ, or to "give their hearts to Jesus" through conversion.

Yet today a fierce controversy rages over the theological need and appropriateness of conversion. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, and increasingly since the 1960's, some have argued that the conversion of individuals and groups can and should be separated from the main goal of Christian mission. This amounts to an argument that mission can and should be carried out without seeking converts or, in other words, that "conversionless Christianity" is a valid form of mission in an age of religious pluralism.

II. Intimations of an Emerging Problem: Changes in the Pattern of Christian Mission as We Have Known It in the Past

Eminent world Christian leaders have recently expressed grave concern over a growing tendency to separate mission from the goal of conversion, baptism, and the growth of local churches. Their statements reflect a heartfelt lament over the disappearance of "mission as we have known it" and its replacement by forms of mission that do not have conversion and baptism as a central goal.

The prescient founding General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Willem A. Visser t'Hooft, identified change in the nature and understanding of mission as one of the most serious issues troubling the future of the ecumenical movement.[5] "Should we replace mission as it has been practiced up till now by a dialogue with other religions?"he asked.[6] This respected ecumenical leader knew the twentieth century ecumenical movement as represented by the World Council of Churches was in large part the outcome of cooperative efforts of world evangelization culminating in the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910). Edinburgh held out the hope of completing the unfinished task of world evangelization in one generation, always with the expectation that significant numbers of groups and individuals would accept Christ, be converted and baptized, and enter the fellowship of the church. Early in the ecumenical movement, said Visser t'Hooft, its leaders had to face the question of whether it would move toward a "Christ-centered ecumenism" or an "all embracing union of religions." The choice of what he called the "real leaders" of the ecumenical movement had always been for a movement founded in the Gospel. Yet there had also been academic voices urging Christians, especially in the face of secularism, to make common cause with other faiths for bringing the religious life of various countries and cultures to their fullest development.

This alternative viewpoint had surfaced already at the Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council (1928). It was later advocated by Prof. William Hocking in his contribution to the report of the Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry, published as *Rethinking Missions* (1932). Hocking proposed that Christian missionaries should join forces with representatives of other religions in a "common search for truth," looking forward to "unity in the completest religious truth."[7] In practical terms this meant abandoning efforts to make converts and concentrating on humanitarian work. Visser t'Hooft himself rejected this as "mission without backbone," and strongly identified with the position based on "biblical realism," as enunciated by Hendrik Kraemer at the IMC Tambaram/Madras Conference (1938-39). According to Kraemer, "Christ is the norm and the crisis for all values and truth,"[8] and therefore mission theology must reject every kind of relativism and syncretism.

Yet after World War II fierce attacks were directed by critics in both East and West at the traditional missionary view which upheld the "uniqueness of Christianity." The older missionary appeal had begun to lose much of its glamour, Visser t'Hooft conceded, and by the time of the WCC Fourth Assembly at Uppsala (1968), the ecumenical world was beginning to view interfaith dialogue as a convenient replacement for proclamation directed toward conversion, baptism and church formation. For this ecumenical statesman, the question of how the church meets the challenge of modern religiosity and the claims of other faiths had become "the central problem of our witness."[9] He no doubt rejoiced when the WCC Central Committee gave its

approval to the *Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism* (1982), strongly declaring the "call to mission," the "call to proclamation and witness," and placing "conversion" at the head of a list of seven ecumenical convictions essential to mission.[10]

On the Catholic side, no more staunch advocate for a Christ-centered mission *"ad gentes,"* carried out through proclamation, conversion and baptism, could be imagined than Pope John Paul II. In what one commentator referred to as "certainly the most authoritative and significant document of [John Paul II's] pontificate,"[11] the Pope expressed his concern that after two millenniums "the mission of Christ the Redeemer is still far from completion and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service" (*Redemptoris Missio, RM, 1).* Deeply convinced of the "urgency of missionary activity," and believing it to be "a matter for all Christians," John Paul II made no secret of his grave concern about certain negative tendencies which he said were not in line with the directives of Vatican II or the Catholic Magisterium, but which tended to become substitutes for mission to the nations (*"ad gentes"*). Difficulties "both external and internal" were weakening the church's missionary thrust and must arouse the concern of all believers in Christ, since in the Pope's judgment they were "a sign of the crisis of faith"(*RM, 1*). Missionary activity, the Pope believed, would renew faith and revitalize the church. In the collapse of old ideologies and the opening of new communications frontiers, the Holy Father sensed that "the moment has come to commit all of the churches' energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*"(*RM, 1*).

In making this bold appeal John Paul II showed that he was well aware of contextual changes and missiological factors which had led to a diminution of mission *ad gentes*. Some people wondered, he noted, *"Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant?* Has it not been replaced by inter-religious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the church's mission? Does not respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? *Why then should there be missionary activity?"* (*RM, 4,* italics in original) In a carefully framed Trinitarian exposition of Catholic missionary teaching, the Pope went on to speak of faith in Christ, of the church in the service of the kingdom, and of the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit (RM, 5-30).

The Pope made a crucial distinction between pastoral care to existing churches and believers, and the evangelization of "people and groups who do not yet believe in Christ," "who are far from Christ," or in whom "the Church has not yet taken root." He insisted that the "specifically missionary work" of "proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and promoting the values of the Kingdom" must not simply be absorbed into the "overall mission of the whole people of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten"(*RM, 34).* Without mission *ad gentes*, he asserted, "the Church's

missionary dimension would be deprived of its *essential meaning* and of the very activity that exemplifies it"(Ibid.).

The Pope conceded that there were seemingly insurmountable external difficulties such as missionaries being refused entry in some countries or the prohibition of evangelization and conversion, even of worship, in others. But there were also painful and even more serious difficulties *within* the People of God: lack of fervor, disenchantment, indifference based on religious relativism, and needing correction (*RM, 35-36*). Still, proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ, inspired by faith and in union with the ecclesial community, must remain the "permanent priority of mission" (*RM, 44-45*). "The proclamation of the word of God has *Christian conversion* as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith." Conversion is a gift of God, a work of the Triune God through the Spirit who opens people's hearts so they can believe, expressed in "faith which is total and radical" which gives rise to "a dynamic and lifelong process" demanding a continual and lifelong turning away from life according to the flesh to life in the Spirit. "Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple"(*RM, 46*). Conversion is joined to baptism by the will of Christ and because of the need to "receive the fulness of new life in Christ"(*RM, 47*), the Pope noted, adding that sacramental commitment demonstrates the church is the place where Christ is found

At Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, Dr. Billy Graham in a public address entitled "Why Lausanne?" delivered a stinging criticism of the existing Protestant missionary movement to delegates assembled for the International Congress on World Evangelization.[12] Taking the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910) and founding the Student Volunteer Movement (1886) as a baseline, Graham lamented that many of the evangelistic movements of the nineteenth century had later lost their zeal, due in part to external barriers but even more to internal theological changes "subtly infiltrating Christian youth movements" and weakening their ties to orthodox faith. Nineteenth century missionary movements, said Graham, were "based on the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God," "had a definite view of salvation (and) took seriously what the Bible says about man's lostness and his need for redemption." "They also believed strongly in *conversion,* convinced that by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit men could be forgiven and changed." And "they believed that evangelism was not an option but an imperative...that the primary mission of the Church is to declare the Good News of Jesus Christ."[13]

"Since then," said Graham at Lausanne 1974, "the world church has floundered. It has lost much of the vision and zeal of those days," mainly for three reasons: (1) loss of the authority of the message of the Gospel; (2) preoccupation with social and political problems; and (3) equal preoccupation with organizational unity.[14] From Edinburgh, said Graham, came two major streams of the modern missionary movement – the first "evangelical," and the second "ecumenical." In ecumenical mission, Graham believed, the spotlight

had gradually shifted from evangelism to a preoccupation with social and political action and to the call for "humanization."

Graham's challenged the delegates to Lausanne to recapture the fervor of earlier missionary and evangelistic movements by returning to their traditional theological moorings and avoiding the pitfalls that he believed had undermined conciliar missionary efforts. One major fruit of the Lausanne Congress was the adoption of the *Lausanne Covenant,* a statement in fifteen articles affirming the evangelical faith and commitment to the unfinished evangelistic task[15], as the basis for ongoing worldwide missionary cooperation among evangelicals. Another was the creation of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) as a continuation committee to assist with mobilizing evangelical groups and resources, to encourage prayer, to plan strategy, to facilitate communication, and generally to pursue the objectives laid out at Lausanne.

These vignettes are in one sense indicative of a nostalgia for the lost simplicity and clarity of earlier times. At the same time they reflect a deep anxiety over the threatened disappearance of deeply and sincerely held convictions about the essential character of Christian mission. The displacement of conversion was a major cause of this anxiety.

III. Challenges to the Right to Conversion as an Aspect of Religious Freedom, and Confusion between Conversion and Proselytism

During the second half of the twentieth century enormous changes took place in the pattern of Christian world mission and in global Christian relationships. These are well known and need not be mentioned in detail here. The new context of religious pluralism was the change with the most direct and immediate implications for Christian mission, and especially for the practice of conversion. Revival of other major world religions following decolonization in the Two-Thirds World was often accompanied by a renewed missionary consciousness in those religions. Religious revivals were sometimes accompanied by religious fanaticism and a determination to reclaim converts lost earlier to Christianity. Religious coexistence produced competition, rivalry and tension between Christianity and some older established religious faiths, especially those undergoing renewal or revival after independence. The tension was strongly felt by churches in Asia. In the West, an influx of adherents to non-Christian religions also changed the religious landscape and provoked a crisis of confidence. The thousand-year dominance of Western Christendom suddenly collapsed as homogeneous Christian societies were replaced by multireligious ones. The religious monopoly of Christian churches was

challenged, and the widely held view of the "absoluteness" of Christianity over against other faiths. Christendom now faced great difficulty in adapting to a new situation in which Christianity had suddenly become only one among various religious choices.[16] The world after 2000 was vastly changed from the quiescent, colonial-dominated world of 1900 when the religious monopoly of Christianity remained largely unchallenged.

In the first half of the twentieth century, especially following World War II, many Western nations and religious communities began to recognize pluralism as an emerging feature of Western civilization. In adjusting to diversity, they sought to build functioning institutions that could operate within pluralist societies. One of the boldest and most comprehensive international organizations for world peace, security and human betterment is the United Nations, established on October 24, 1945 as a successor to the failed League of Nations. It symbolizes a global response to the various challenges of pluralism - religious, social, cultural, economic and political. The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations contains these words:

> We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person...to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties can be maintained...to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom – and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure...that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples – have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.[17]

Among the outstanding achievements of the UN was the setting up of a Commission on Human Rights in 1946, and the approval by the General Assembly in 1948 of the draft document known as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The General Assembly proclaimed this declaration as "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" and called on UN member states and social organs to keep the Declaration constantly in mind, to strive for respect for its enumerated rights and freedoms, and "to secure their universal recognition and observance." Among the thirty articles of the Declaration dealing with every conceivable human freedom, and specifying corresponding rights to which individuals are entitled, Article 18 deals specifically with "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" and is especially relevant to our study. It reads:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes *freedom to change his religion or belief,* and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to *manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*[18]

This right is coupled with other rights guaranteeing freedom of information and peaceful assembly. This "common standard" adopted by members of the UN General Assembly in 1948 and reiterated on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration in 1998 plainly claims for all peoples, nations and individuals the right of *conversion* as well as the right of *evangelization.* Each of the three mission constituencies that we will examine in this essay – the World Council of Churches at its 1948 founding assembly, the Second Vatican Council, and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization – quickly recognized the significance of the Universal Declaration's article on religious freedom for the life of the church and its mission, and gave it their full assent and endorsement.

Apart from moral suasion and the prestige of the United Nations, there is no mechanism of enforcement of the right of religious freedom, and no procedure for adjudicating conflicting claims. Nor is it known how UN member states and religious groups which ban conversion, or restrict religious practices other than those of the dominant faith or of a state-supported ideology, would in a particular instance respond to the declaration. At any rate, groups seeking greater freedom for public religious expression and for the right of conversion can appeal to the UN declaration as a "common standard" for all peoples and nations.

Conversion vs. Proselytism: A Crucial Distinction

In the Bible and in the history of the Christian church, "proselytism" has had a quite honorable and positive meaning. A "proselyte" was normally a gentile who through belief in God and acceptance of the Torah gained acceptance into the Jewish community by the rite of circumcision and a ritual cleansing. Christianity took over this meaning to describe a person who converted from paganism, and evangelization was often described as "proselytizing" in a positive sense.[19]

More recently, however, "proselytism" has acquired a negative and pejorative connotation, especially when used to describe activities of Christians to win adherents from other Christian bodies, or from other faiths. The presupposition is that such activities proceed from "unworthy motives or by unjust means that violate the conscience of the human person"[20] or ignore the reality of other churches and their approach to pastoral practice. Proselytism

when so understood is opposed to the biblical idea of conversion, to ecumenical understanding and goodwill among Christian bodies, and to mutual respect and understanding between Christians and other faith communities. This has prompted major mission organizations to hold a number of joint consultations on problems posed by proselytism, in order to be able to give a genuinely common witness to the Christian faith.[21]

John R. W. Stott, chairperson of the drafting committee of the *Lausanne Covenant (1974),* declared the way to distinguish between evangelism and proselytism is to understand proselytism as "unworthy witness." He brilliantly summarized the characteristics of proselytism as (1) unworthy *motives* (when our concern is for our own glory rather than God's); (2) unworthy *methods* (when we resort to any physical coercion, moral constraint or psychological pressure); and (3) unworthy *message* (when we deliberately misrepresent other people's beliefs).[22] Limits of space do not allow us to document here many instances of unworthy *motives,* unworthy *methods* and unworthy *messages* which have compromised the record of Christian expansion from the West beginning in the post-Constantinian period, continuing through the Crusades and the Inquisition, and multiplying throughout the era of Western conquest and imperialism. These represent a serious stain on the record of Christian missions, and a reproach to Christian triumphalism, despite the good which was accomplished by many faithful witnesses.

We will use the term "proselytism" to signify all abuses of the practice of conversion which deviate from a Christian understanding of true conversion, are harmful to ecumenical understanding and good will, and are opposed to mutual respect between religious communities. In this pejorative sense, proselytism can refer to activities which seek to induce persons who are already Christians to change their church affiliation; it can also refer to activities which seek by unworthy means to induce adherents of other faiths to embrace Christianity. Among such activities are the following: making unjust or uncharitable references to other churches' beliefs and practices, or ridiculing them; doing the same toward other religions, either out of ignorance or contempt; employing any physical violence, moral compulsion or psychological pressure; using political, social or economic power as a means of winning new members for one's church; extending explicit or implicit offers of education, health care or material inducements; exploiting people's needs, weaknesses or lack of education, especially in situations of distress. [23]

In drawing this distinction between *proselytism*, so understood, and *conversion* in its biblical and apostolic meaning, we wish to defend the right of conversion and to protect it from further distortions and abuses, as well as from unwarranted objections directed against it by adherents of other faiths. There may be contextual factors in the situation of religious pluralism which lend themselves to ambiguity, or lead to mistaken judgments about the motives or circumstances in which the conversion of a particular person or group of persons takes place. Yet an entirely defensible argument can be made for

genuine Christian conversions, even in the difficult context of religious pluralism, if Christians will renounce all "unworthy witness." All who are engage in Christian mission must join hands in defending the right and necessity of Christian conversion, and base their work on apostolic practices.

IV. Interfaith (Interreligious) Dialogue as a Replacement for Mission Seeking Conversion, Baptism and Church Membership

The growing acceptance of the practice of interfaith dialogue, along with problems already described, appears to be one major cause of a reduced emphasis on conversion. This is particularly true in the case of mission agencies espousing interfaith dialogue as a replacement for "mission as we have known it in the past." We will look at the separate ways in which three major mission constituencies – the conciliar (or ecumenical), the Roman Catholic, and the evangelical – have attempted to come to terms with the emerging conflict between traditional mission and mission as interfaith dialogue. Each tradition has had difficulty in accommodating the theology and practice of dialogue to its own traditional understanding of mission. Differences among the three mission constituencies in their attitudes to interfaith dialogue shed light on the relative priority which each gives to mission *ad gentes* – which in John Paul II's view always includes *conversion, baptism* and incorporation into the *church.*

Evangelization with conversion, baptism and church formation as its aim has always been the classical understanding of apostolic mission. But under the influence of religious pluralism there have been repeated calls for mission agencies to back off from, renounce, or quietly set aside, efforts to gain converts in favor of less hostile or challenging approaches toward non-Christians. For some, the preferred approach has been to offer non-sectarian *service* (normally education and medicine) and *development* activities, impartially directed toward both Christian and non-Christian populations. Many see these as ideal expressions of the missionary intention, given the explosive context of religious pluralism. Others advocate interfaith *dialogue* in the form of mutual witnessing and open sharing between representatives of different faiths as an alternative way of communicating the gospel message. The underlying assumption is normally that participants come prepared to renounce all intention of seeking to convert the dialogue partner. We will look at the different ways in which conciliar (ecumenical), Roman Catholic, and evangelical groups have struggled to define their separate understandings of the relationship between mission aimed at conversion and interfaith dialogue.

A. The Ecumenical (Conciliar) Response: Conflict, Compromise, and Continuing Ambiguity

The road leading to interfaith dialogue in Christian communions belonging to the World Council of Churches has been slow and strewn with obstacles. Clarification of the meaning of interfaith dialogue and its relation to mission has been evolving slowly and until now has still not been satisfactorily resolved. At the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910), an important ecumenical antecedent of the formation of the World Council of Churches, the policy section dealing with the missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions – particularly religions of Asia – attracted great attention. The concept of "dialogue" had not yet emerged, and so the discussion centered mainly on the church's distinctive evangelistic message to each of several religions under consideration. At the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council (1928) little progress was made in resolving the Christian approach to other faiths. Some argued for a united stand of Christians and other religionists against the growing threat of secularism, while others sought to protect the uniqueness of Christianity. As noted earlier, issuance of the report of the *Laymen's Foreign Mission Enquiry,* edited by William E. Hocking, compounded the confusion with its recommendation that Christian missions abandon conversions and engage in a "common search for truth" with other religions. This set the stage for the Madras/Tambaram Meeting of the IMC (1938-39), for which Dr. Hendrik Kraemer was asked to write the preparatory study volume entitled *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World.* Kraemer's bold Christocentric affirmation of the uniqueness of the gospel message and its discontinuity from other religious systems did not go unchallenged at Tambaram, but it was widely accepted for several decades as the dominant missionary viewpoint in mission circles associated with the International Missionary Council (IMC). Following World War II, with the collapse of colonialism, the rise of Asian nationalism and the resurgence of previously dormant Asian religions, however, the Kraemer thesis was increasingly called into question by Asian Christian scholars who began to articulate alternative views.[24]

The actual beginning of the use of "dialogue" in the sense of dialogue between contemporary world religions stems from the work of several interreligious study and research centers organized in Asia in the 1950's. African centers dealing with "Islam in Africa" also contributed. At Nagpur, India in March 1961, directors of several religious study centers produced a preliminary response to the WCC Department of Missionary Studies project dealing with the "Study of the Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men." At the WCC New Delhi Assembly (1961), at which the IMC was integrated into the structure of the WCC, Dr. Paul David Devanandam, co-Director of the Bangalore (India) Study Center, challenged assembly delegates to take seriously the experiences of Asian churches in struggling together with peoples of other religious traditions in the work of "nation building."At the first meeting of the new WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) at Mexico City (1963), interfaith dialogue received further attention, and even more so at the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC, later ACC) meeting at Bangalore in 1964.

A meeting convened by the WCC at Kandy, Sri Lanka in 1967, with Roman Catholic consultants from the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians present, marks the beginning of serious interest in interfaith dialogue on the part of the WCC. Interfaith dialogue was prominently noted in the report on "Renewal in Mission" at the Uppsala WCC Assembly (1968). Soon thereafter the WCC- CWME engaged the Indian theologian, Stanley Samartha, to pursue the follow-up on the study of the "Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men." One of Samartha's first projects was the convening of the first interfaith dialogue under WCC auspices at Ajaltoun, Lebanon in 1970. It included Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian participants. Out of the evaluation of the Ajaltoun meeting at a consultation in Zurich came a recommendation that led to the creation of a new WCC subunit on Dialogue with People of Other Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI) by the WCC Central Committee at its Addis Ababa meeting (1971). The new unit was to be administratively located within the WCC program unit for faith and witness, but independent of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). Samartha was named director of the new subunit, and was personally identified with its ongoing activities.[25]

The growing prominence of interfaith dialogue on the WCC agenda can be traced in statements from successive WCC assemblies. The New Delhi Assembly (1961) had referred to "dialogue" only in passing, mostly in the Socratic sense of listening and inquiring before speaking about the relevance of the Gospel. It was described as an effective tool for evangelism[26], but there was no mention of interfaith dialogue. By the time of the Uppsala Assembly (1968), it was possible to include a quite positive reference to interfaith dialogue in the section report on "Renewal in Mission." This report said, among other things:

> The meeting with men of other faiths or no faith must lead to dialogue. A Christian's dialogue with another implies neither a denial of the uniqueness of Christ, nor any loss of his own commitment to Christ, but rather that a genuinely Christian approach to others must be human, personal, relevant and humble.... Each meets and challenges the other; witnessing from the depths of his existence to the ultimate concerns that come to expression in word and action. As Christians we believe that Christ speaks in the dialogue, revealing himself to those who do not know him and connecting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do.[27]

The positive claims made for dialogue at Uppsala may have been designed to preempt negative criticisms by some WCC delegates who wondered whether dialogue was becoming a substitute for "mission as we have known it," and thus constituted a kind of "Trojan horse." Any controversy over interfaith dialogue at Uppsala appears to have been deflected by the larger controversy surrounding the definition of mission as "the invitation to men to grow up into their full humanity in the new man, Jesus Christ," the so-called "humanization" debate.[28]

By the time of the WCC Nairobi Assembly (1975), the simmering dialogue controversy was ready to break out into "impassioned and sometimes acrimonious debate" marking an "inevitable showdown" between the "traditional understanding of mission as converting others and an emerging concept of 'mutual witness' in which dialogue was seen not just as one more tool for mission but as a context in which authentic witness might be given[29]."For Stanley Samartha's dialogue program it was the "decisive hour." The ironic fact about the "mission vs. dialogue" debate at Nairobi is that it took place precisely at a time when the WCC was striving to reassert its historic faithfulness to the evangelistic mandate set forth at Edinburgh 1910. During the year prior to the Nairobi Assembly, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), meeting at Lusaka, Zambia at a time of unprecedented growth among African churches, gave special attention to the evangelization of frontier situations. Eastern Orthodox theologians meeting in Bucharest held a consultation on "Confessing Christ Today," and their input strongly influenced the formulation of Section I at Nairobi. In July 1974 the International Congress on World Evangelization brought together 400 evangelical leaders at Lausanne, Switzerland, to consider strategies and programs for completing the Great Commission. Billy Graham had specifically challenged the Lausanne Assembly to take up the task of world evangelization which he saw the ecumenical movement as abandoning. And in October 1974 the Third General Assembly of the Roman Bishops Synod met in Rome to consider "Evangelization in the Modern World," a meeting which resulted a year later in Pope Paul VI's issuance of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi.* The Nairobi Assembly thus not only reflected all these antecedents but it was at pains to build bridges toward other Christian movements in relation to mission and evangelism.[30] This cluster of circumstances set the stage for the "showdown" between mission and dialogue at Nairobi.

In the WCC fifth plenary session at Nairobi, Bishop Mortimer Arias presented a ringing address on evangelism, in which he attempted to restate the WCC's commitment to evangelism as an *essential, primary and a permanent* task.[31] In Section I on "Confessing Christ Today," delegates were drafting a report which would say that WCC member churches "boldly confess Christ alone as Saviour and Lord" and boldly declare that "confessing Christ and being converted to his discipleship belong inseparably together."[32] Meanwhile, in Section III, "Seeking Community: The Common Search of People of Various Faiths, Cultures and Ideologies," the discussion chair asked delegates to

consider what was the right relationship between Christians and people of other faiths and ideologies. This section played host to five distinguished guests belonging to other faiths – a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Muslim and a Sikh – who were also invited to give reactions to various proposals. The majority of delegates who spoke, mainly Westerners, were not happy with the draft report. They believed that it would be understood as a "spiritual compromise" and the abandonment of the mission of the church. The objections were felt to be so serious that the draft needed to be sent back for revision before voting on it.[33] Clearly, delegates who supported "mission as we have known it" were not ready to give an unconditional "green light" to the theological assumptions and activities of the dialogue subunit, particularly in light of Nairobi Section I's call to "confess Christ" and Bishop Arias' bold reassertion of evangelism as the *essential, primary and permanent* task of the churches.

What probably saved the day for the dialogue program was the forceful intervention of several respected Asian church leaders who were "actual practitioners of dialogue" and strongly convinced of its importance for Asian churches in their mission, especially in the pluralistic religious situation. Principal Russell Chandran of Bangalore, S. India, stating that he was convinced both by first-hand experience with dialogue as well as by theological reasons, argued that the "Kraemerian approach" needed to be abandoned or modified in favor of the approach through dialogue. Witnessing to Christ, he said, must be a "two way movement of mutual learning and enrichment."

> The church which evangelizes is also evangelized in the sense that its knowledge and experience of Jesus Christ and his gospel is deepened by the response of those to whom the gospel is proclaimed.... Therefore those who preach Christ to people of other faiths should also be willing and expectant to learn about the fullness of the reality of Christ by listening to what they (i.e. the dialogue partners) have to say in witness of their faith.[34]

Lynn de Silva, Director of the Study Center in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with long time experience of actual participation in dialogue, sought to allay the fears, misgivings and anxieties of those who had no such personal experience. Dialogue does not, said de Silva, diminish one's full and loyal commitment to one's own faith, but rather enriches and strengthens it. Nor is it a temptation to syncretism, he added, for "one's own faith is tested and refined and sharpened thereby. The real test of faith is faiths-in-relation." Dialogue is urgent for churches in Asia, de Silva went on, "to repudiate the arrogance, aggression and negativism of our evangelistic crusades" which have caricatured Christianity as a militant religion."If we are not prepared to listen to people of other faiths," he said, "they will not listen to us.... Dialogue therefore is essential in order to

dispel the misunderstandings and prejudices of the past created by our negative attitude to other faiths."[35] The testimony of these and other mainly Asian scholars carried the day. The report of Sec. III, with its endorsement of interfaith dialogue, was commended to the churches for study.

In the report of the Nairobi Assembly, the WCC reaffirmed that proclamation of the Gospel remained a priority task for its member churches, and committed its headquarters staff to providing assistance and support to the churches in carrying out their evangelistic task. The WCC wished to place renewed emphasis on evangelism as the *essential* and *primary* task of the churches while at the same time giving provisional support to interfaith dialogue. Even so, acute differences continued to divide conciliar Christians about whether the emphasis on dialogue would "blunt the cutting edge of mission" or actually further mission. The suspicion already existed among dialogue partners that dialogue might simply be a new name for proselytization. On the other hand, dialogue supporters insisted that dialogue would lose its meaning unless Christians bore witness to the salvation they received in Jesus Christ. The precise theological understanding of dialogue in relation to mission, however, remained to be formulated. The Nairobi debate had made clear an urgent need to clarify the nature, purpose and limits of interfaith dialogue and to give further attention to such issues as syncretism, the cultural context, and mission.

The WCC Central Committee, upon evaluating the issues left unresolved at Nairobi, authorized the holding of a major theological consultation to clarify those issues. The consultation was held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1977 on the theme, "Dialogue in Community." Recommendations from the Chiang Mai consultation were received by the Central Committee at its 1977 meeting with praise for the degree of agreement and mutual understanding achieved. Chiang Mai proved to be a turning point in the entire process. After further revision and amplification, the Chiang Mai Statement was formally adopted by the WCC Central Committee at its 1979 meeting under the title "Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies."[36]

What distinguished the new statement on dialogue (1979) from the earlier interim statement (1971) was its broadened rationale, and its careful dealing with theological issues. The new statement emphasizes the sharing of their faith by Christians with neighbors of other faiths and ideologies, with whom they share a common human community, rather than scholarly exchanges between religious specialists. Interfaith dialogue is described as a Christian "style of living in relationship with neighbors," rather than a specialized process. It is an expression of loving Christian service within community rather than a weapon of "aggressive Christian militancy." In dialogue Christians seek to "speak the truth in a spirit of love." There is no contradiction between dialogue and the giving of witness. In a much quoted phrase,

> ...we feel able with integrity to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today; at the same time we feel able with integrity to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as genuine fellow pilgrims, to speak with them of what we believe God to have done in Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue.[37]

Confessing Christ before non-Christians was advocated, but the statement avoided any mention of the sensitive issue of conversion.

In discussing the theological significance of Christian participation in "dialogue in community," the statement noted that Christians could not avoid asking themselves "penetrating questions" about the place of people of other faiths "in the activity of God in history." What is God doing in the lives of such persons? Christians needed to approach these issues in a spirit of *repentance, humility, joy* and *integrity.* They would find it necessary to give renewed attention to the Christian doctrine of creation; the work of the Spirit; the nature of Christ; and the authority of the Bible. They would ask themselves about the relationship between God's *universal* creative and redemptive activity "towards all humankind" and God's *particular* creative and redemptive activity in the history of Israel and in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The statement declined to formulate answers to these and similar puzzling questions.

On the subject of "syncretism" – a perceived danger in dialogue – Christians were called to be "adventurous" and "ready to take risks, but also to be watchful and wide awake for God." The statement condemned "syncretism" in the sense of "conscious or unconscious human attempts to create a new religion composed of elements taken from different religions." But it affirmed the need to translate the Christian message into the cultural context of other faiths and ideologies, while at the same time recognizing the danger of "compromising the authenticity of Christian faith and life" in the process. Another danger was that of seeing Christianity merely as a generic variant of many other approaches to God (religious relativism), or wrongly seeing another faith as "a partial understanding of what Christians believe they know in full."[38]

Subsequent WCC-sponsored meetings reiterated the dialogue approach, and sought to integrate it more fully into the conciliar style of witness. The treatment of conversion reflected a continuing ambiguity. The CWME Melbourne meeting (1980), on the theme "Your Kingdom Come" and "Good News to the Poor," was emphatic that proclamation of God's word was the responsibility of the whole church and of every member, and a "continual necessity" in which "all people, believers and un-believers alike, are challenged to hear and respond since conversion is never finished." "Preaching expects conversion," which results from the action of the Holy Spirit and involves "a turning from and a turning to." Dialogue was mentioned only as an aspect of

common witness.[39] In 1982 the WCC Central Committee gave approval to its acclaimed statement, "*Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism.*" This statement was widely embraced in both conciliar and evangelical circles as a statement of convergence. It conspicuously identified *conversion* as the first among seven common convictions shared by participants in the one worldwide missionary movement. Under the heading "Witness among people of living faiths," the *Ecumenical Affirmation* stated: "Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and every people."[40] Significantly, in this summary interfaith dialogue was *not* listed as a common conviction. The succession of conciliar statements reflected a continuing ambivalence between conversion-oriented evangelism and dialogue.

At the WCC Vancouver Assembly (1983), the issue of *culture* was lifted up as the context for witnessing. The WCC authorized the holding of a special CWME meeting to explore the problem of "authentic witness within each culture." Vancouver affirmed witness among people of living faiths but "saw the need to distinguish between witness and dialogue, whilst at the same time affirming their interrelatedness."[41] The San Antonio CWME Meeting (1989), striking a new note, affirmed the church's vocation to be "the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord," and stressed that the Triune God was the source and sustainer of the church's mission. The church's ministry of witness flows from gratitude to the living God, not simply from an obligation laid on Christians. Mission in the name of the living God leads to repentance on the part of those involved in mission. The call to conversion and service in the reign of God "should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling – repentance for 'our arrogance and insensitivity, but also of our failure of nerve.'" The call to unity in mission is coupled with a condemnation of *proselytism* – turning evangelism into a program of denominational aggrandizement. Fields for witness include both people of secularized society and people of other living faiths. "The proclamation of the gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ." "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God." "We affirm that witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but expands and deepens it."[42]

The WCC Canberra Assembly (1991), on the theme "Come, Holy Spirit," recapitulated many of the preceding themes. Recognizing that unity and diversity are "twin elements in Christian *koinonia*," it pleaded for a spirit of *reconciliation* and for the maintenance of a clear and united confession of Jesus Christ as God and Savior amidst all diversity. It called for Christians to develop a "culture of dialogue" and reaffirmed that dialogue is an authentic form of Christian witness and ministry.[43] The CWME meeting at Salvador, de Bahia, Brazil (1996), "Called to One Hope – The Gospel in Diverse Cultures," focused on a better understanding of "the way in which the gospel challenges all human

cultures and how culture can give us a clearer understanding of the gospel." The local church was seen as *distinctive from*, but also *committed to*, the culture in which it is set. "The gospel becomes neither captive to a culture nor alienated from it, but each challenges and illuminates the other." In the section on "Witnessing in Religiously Plural Societies," mature advice on the subject of dialogue was offered. "Before entering into dialogue...a local congregation should be clear about its own identity in Christ, for dialogue implies that Christians bear witness to the good news of their experience of Jesus Christ." Mission must be "in Christ's way." To dialogue is to witness to the love of God revealed in Christ. "Dialogue is about reconciliation where there is alienation." Christians may be surprised to encounter Christ where they would least expect him. Certain factors may inhibit local congregations from entering into dialogue with their neighbors of other faiths: self-sufficiency, embarrassment, lack of preparation, minority status, situations of tension. To overcome these problems, training in the teachings and practices of other faiths, awareness programs dealing with religious customs and beliefs, and special leadership programs were recommended.[44]

After nearly fifty years of experimentation and debate, the place of interfaith dialogue in the missiology of the conciliar movement has now reached a point of apparent *stasis*. The period began with optimistic claims by dialogue advocates, quickly followed by sharply critical objections by supporters of traditional mission. The Nairobi Assembly (1975) was the turning point. The adoption of official WCC "Guidelines" (1979) signaled a kind of conciliar blessing for interfaith dialogue as a strategy for churches living in religiously plural situations, but seeking to be faithful to their calling to share the gospel with neighbors of other faiths. Humble and servant-like *witness* replaced bold *proclamation*. Interfaith dialogue and Christian witness were now virtually equated. Talk about the *conversion* of nonbelievers was quietly set aside in favor of a call for repentance and the conversion of Christians themselves so that they might better witness "in Christ's way." Essential theological questions were raised but not really answered. Roadblocks to dialogue were identified, and expectations for the outcome of dialogue were adjusted downward.

In a WCC document entitled "Taking Stock of 30 Years of Dialogue and Revisiting the 1979 Guidelines,"[45] consultants reaffirmed the value of existing guidelines but also expressed new concerns. "Greater awareness of religious plurality has heightened the need for improved relations and dialogue among people of other faiths," the report said. The increased danger of misusing religion as a pretext for communal tension or as a cause of conflict was recognized. Religious identities might be drawn into ethnic conflicts, obscuring the real causes of such conflicts and leading to explosive violence. Interreligious relations and dialogue could "help prevent religion from becoming the fault line between communities." Partners in dialogue should be involved in the planning process, setting a common agenda, and insuring that objectives are met. They

should refrain from proselytism or seeking primarily the growth of their own communities. "Interreligious dialogue is not an instrument to resolve problems instantly in emergency situations," but over the long term it can "contribute toward resolving political or communal conflicts and restoring peace." In times of conflict it may prevent religion from being used as a weapon, and open the way for reconciliation.[46]

In retrospect, the conflict over interreligious dialogue in the WCC, and the WCC's grudging reluctance to adopt dialogue as an aid and partner in mission, grew out of a lack of theological preparation for interfaith dialogue in the Protestant tradition. Only the intervention of Asian church leaders, and the desire to avoid communal strife and tension, were able in time to overcome this reluctance.

B. The Roman Catholic Solution: Complementarity of Proclamation and Dialogue

In contrast to conciliar Protestants, Roman Catholics found the acceptance of interreligious dialogue (their preferred term) much easier. The classical Protestant tradition, based on the *sola scriptura* principle, offered no solid theological undergirding for dialogue between Christians and people of other faiths. WCC meetings correctly identified the underlying theological issues, but they were not able to develop a common theological position. Roman Catholics, by contrast, discovered a clear theological rationale for the practice of interreligious dialogue. For Roman Catholics the church's evangelizing mission could be described as a "single but complex and articulated reality" containing at least five principal elements. Of these, dialogue with followers of other religious traditions was certainly an integral one.[47] The totality of Christian mission, said *Dialogue and Mission* (D&M), a 1984 statement of the Pontifical Council for Non-Christians, embraces: (1) the simple presence and living witness of Christian life; (2) commitment to the service of humankind, including activity for social development; (3) liturgical life along with prayer and contemplation; (4) dialogue with followers of other religious traditions "in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern"; and (5) announcement and catechesis in which "the Good News of the Gospel is proclaimed."[48] Beginning with the Second Vatican Council, and increasingly since that event, interreligious dialogue has had a secure place in the Roman Catholic understanding of the "totality of Christian mission," understood as a "single reality" which is at once "complex and articulated." Any tension that might once have existed for Catholics between mission and dialogue has been eliminated.

> Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable.[49]

How did Catholics arrive at such a mutually supportive and interrelated view of the relation between evangelizing mission and interreligious dialogue? The contrast with the magisterial Protestantism of the Reformation period is instructive. A Catholic scholastic theology with its emphasis on revelation as confirming and clarifying reason, and grace as perfecting and fulfilling nature, provided a smooth transition to the acceptance of interreligious dialogue as a legitimate and necessary element in mission. Catholic theology has always allowed for the possibility of doctrinal development "growing toward a plenitude of divine truth." A continuous line of development can be traced from the Scriptures and the early church fathers, through the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council, and culminating in certain post-Council statements.

> The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit.... The Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth. The sayings of the Holy Fathers are a witness to the life giving presence of this Tradition.... Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture together make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God.[50]

The Second Vatican Council spoke of the presence in other religious traditions of "a ray of that truth enlightens all" and recognized "seeds of the Word" pointing to "the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations."[51] The testimony of second century church fathers, notably Justin, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandra, spoke of "seeds" of the Word of God among the nations existing prior to and independently of Scripture, and showing that God has already, though in an incomplete way, been manifest to the nations.[52]

The Council reaffirmed that "salvation in Jesus Christ is, in a mysterious way, a reality open to all persons of good will" (*DP,* 15). Citing the early church fathers, the Council found the effects of God's grace operating in the beliefs, rites and customs of non-Christian peoples and in their religions (*DP,* 16). It was able to conclude that "the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified" (*DP,* 17). The missionary activity of the church is *necessary to perfect in Christ* positive elements found in other religions."Whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations...this activity frees from all taint of evil....Whatever good is found...is healed, ennobled and perfected for the glory of God."(*DP,* 18). The history of salvation from the beginning of creation, which is marked by several covenants, shows a steady advance until its "final fulfilment in Jesus Christ in whom is established

the new and definitive Covenant for all peoples"(*DP,* 19). The election of Israel as the Chosen People is extended to include all nations (*DP,* 20). Jesus, with his open attitude toward those who do not belong to the Chosen People, opens up a new horizon beyond the purely local to "a universality which is both Christological and Pneumatological" (*DP,* 21). Jesus announces the entry of the gentiles into the kingdom of God. "In Jesus Christ we have the fulness of revelation and salvation and the fulfilment of the desires of the nations" (*DP,* 22). In salvation history "God progressively manifests himself and communicates with humankind. This process...reaches its climax in the incarnation of the Son of God" (*DP,* 25).

The Second Vatican Council made reference to this early Christian vision of history, and the church's magisterium since the Council, and especially under Pope John Paul II, has carried this development even further (*DP,* 26-27). John Paul II, stressing the "universal presence of the Holy Spirit," teaches the unity of humankind's creation, its common calling to life in God, and its participation in one plan of salvation.

> In the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience...the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, *even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their savior.* (*DP,* 29; emphasis added)

Due to human sin, other religious traditions may sometimes be inclined to choose evil, and accordingly the incompatibility between fundamental elements of Christian religion and other religious traditions must be recognized. In a spirit of dialogue "Christians may have also to challenge them in a peaceful spirit with regard to the content of their belief"(*DP,* 31-32).

The second part of *Dialogue and Proclamation*, dealing with the mandate of proclamation, is emphatic in declaring that "the Church's mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God established on earth in Jesus Christ...as God's decisive and universal offer of salvation to the world"(*DP,* 58). The church is at the service of the kingdom and witnesses to it (*DP,* 59). The message proclaimed by the apostles at Pentecost included the invitation to repent and to become disciples of Jesus by baptism in his name, and thus to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (*DP,* 60). Saints Peter, Paul and John, in different ways, all proclaimed the Gospel of salvation. In 1975 Pope Paul VI in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*EN*) declared the presentation of the gospel message to be *necessary, unique* and *irreplaceable* (*EN.* 5). Qualities needed for announcing the good news are derived from the gospel itself: confidence in the power of the Spirit; faithfulness; humility; respect; a dialogical spirit; and an inculturated approach – all of which come from union with Christ (*DP,* 70-71).

"To proclaim the name of Jesus and to invite people to become his disciples is a sacred and major duty which the Church cannot neglect" (*DP,* 76).

The third part of *Dialogue and Proclamation* seeks to establish the inner relationship between interreligious dialogue and proclamation as "both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary...intimately related but not interchangeable" (*DP,* 77). Which takes priority in a given situation depends on sensitivity to the situation. "Proclamation...aims at guiding people to *explicit knowledge* of what God has done for all men and women in Jesus Christ and at inviting them to become disciples of Jesus through becoming members of the Church" (*DP,* 81, emphasis added). All Christians are "called to be personally involved in these two ways of carrying out the one mission of the Church" (*DP,* 82). Believers are again reminded that "dialogue...does not constitute the whole mission of the Church, that it cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented toward proclamation..." (*DP,* 82). Thus ends the joint statement of the two Vatican units clarifying the interrelatedness of proclamation and interreligious dialogue as crucial elements in the "single but complex reality" of the church's evangelizing mission.

Unlike conciliar Protestants related to the WCC, Roman Catholics in the post-Vatican II period found a clear theological rationale for maintaining the complementarity and interrelatedness of proclamation and interreligious dialogue. Human beings in their separate religious identities and practices were declared to be already incorporated into God's universal plan of salvation for all peoples. Through interreligious dialogue the church engages them in an exploration of the common ground between believers and persons of other religious backgrounds. Through proclamation the church makes explicit what others feel and believe in their religious search, but cannot articulate, namely that Jesus Christ is the one name by which all are to be saved. Making the truth of the gospel explicit is thus a major reason for evangelizing non-Christians. It is the religious longings and aspirations of non-Christians which cry out for the proclamation of the gospel. For this reason proclamation and dialogue are in reality inseparable brothers which complement each other in accomplishing the overall goal of the church's mission.

C. The Evangelical Position: Dialogue in the Service of Proclamation

The evangelical position on interfaith or interreligious dialogue as held by most signatories of the Lausanne Covenant is more straightforward than the two preceding positions. Evangelicals tend to hold a fairly ambivalent attitude toward dialogue when considered to be a partner in evangelistic activity seeking to bring about the conversion of people to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord

and Savior. Attitudes range from the most conservative view, which regards all dialogue as treason, or a betrayal of the gospel, to a more widely held suspicion, or distrust, of the place of dialogue in evangelism. The Lausanne Covenant, for which Dr. John R. W. Stott served as chair of the drafting committee, takes a more centrist view of interfaith dialogue. We will examine two specific references in the Lausanne Covenant regarding the place and value of dialogue, and then consider Stott's own views on the role of dialogue.

In article three of the Lausanne Covenant, "The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ," syncretism and dialogue are pejoratively linked and condemned in all cases where they point to acceptance of a doctrine of universal salvation. The knowledge of God obtained through general revelation, says this statement, does not save a person. "We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally though all religions and ideologies" (LC, 3). To proclaim Christ as the world's universal Savior "is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved" but is rather an invitation to "wholehearted commitment of repentance and faith" (Ibid.). Thus the Lausanne Covenant rejects the Catholic view of interreligious dialogue as a constituent element alongside proclamation in the church's evangelizing mission, part of a "single but complex articulated reality."

A second reference to dialogue in the Lausanne Covenant is more positive. In article four, "The Nature of Evangelism," we learn that "To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures" and that as "reigning Lord" he offers the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit to all who believe. "Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior...and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God" (LC, 4).

Dialogue which seeks to persuade people to come to Christ as Savior and Lord is declared to be indispensable to evangelism, and is conditionally approved, but it is nevertheless distinguished from evangelism per se. The statement thus distinguishes between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of dialogue.

In a separate treatment of the subject of dialogue John Stott amplifies his views on the subject. He rejects extreme views by evangelicals and liberals, but speaks approvingly of dialogue as a conversation in which partners both listen and learn, as well as speak and instruct, noting that it is found in many passages in the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures. "The Living God of the biblical revelation himself enters into a dialogue with man. He not only speaks but listens." The texts of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea include dialogical situations. Jesus as a boy in the temple, with Nicodemus, and with the Samaritan woman, employed dialogue. Dialogue is an integral part of St. Paul's missionary

method in preaching to both Jews and gentiles. But for Paul, "dialogue was clearly part of his proclamation and subordinate to his proclamation."

Much modern dialogue, says Stott, appears to compromise the gospel. He opposes the view of certain "ecumenical scholars who think and write...that Christ is already present everywhere, including other religions." He has no comment on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio or on the joint Vatican statement, Proclamation and Dialogue, which were not yet available to him. He does however affirm the 1968 WCC Uppsala statement that "true dialogue" which does not deny the uniqueness of Christ, or involve any loss of the dialogue partner's commitment to Christ, is a mark of authenticity; humility; integrity; and sensitivity. Thus Stott stakes out a mediating position between extreme evangelical and ecumenical views, and gives his own qualified endorsement to dialogue as a missionary method.

The Second International Congress on Evangelization (1989), known as "Lausanne II at Manila" and convened by the LCWE, essentially reiterated the Lausanne Covenant (1974) but also amplified it at certain points. The Manila Manifesto in 21 affirmations, again under the chairmanship of John Stott, reaffirmed the lostness of humanity and the absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ, and rejected any implication of universal salvation apart from faith in Christ.

> We affirm that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only way. (# 7)

The Manila statement conceded that "the religions which have arisen do sometimes contain elements of truth and beauty" but declared that they are not for that reason to be seen as "alternative gospels."

> We therefore reject both the relativism which regards all religions and spiritualities as equally valid approaches to God, and the syncretism which tries to mix faith in Christ and other faiths.

Lausanne II at Manila stopped short of identifying those persons or groups holding the doctrine of relativism or practicing gospel syncretism, but its message was clear enough.

Even at Lausanne I and II, with their ambivalence toward the use of dialogue and their firm doctrinal stand against universalism, there were isolated voices that expressed the need to explore interreligious dialogue in the missionary context of religious pluralism more deeply. At Lausanne I (1974), David Gitari, then General Secretary of the Bible Society of Kenya, carefully

reviewed the biblical record and the ecumenical testimony regarding dialogue and pointed to its value and relevance, especially for white Western missionaries.

> Despite its demerits, discussion about dialogical approach has many useful insights for evangelical Christians including missionaries. In the past, there has been a tendency by some white missionaries to approach men of other faiths with blunt arrogance and insensitivity and total lack of humility and understanding. Dialogical approach discourages such attitudes and calls us not to assume that other religions are but a "rotten heap of superstitions, taboos and magic."

Gitari believed that the cultural, historical and religious context of the hearers should be taken more seriously. He also spoke of the possibility that dialogue might "enrich Christianity" in Africa by making it more contextual.

> The white missionaries have imported into the church in Africa certain church institutions...which have tended to imprison the liberty of the Gospel in outmoded medieval thought forms.... This could be the reason why African Independent Churches are growing faster than historic churches.

Among the more than four hundred workshops offered at Lausanne II (1989), two dealt with "The Challenge of Other Religions." British evangelical missiologist Colin Chapman challenged his group to develop a "theology of other religions" to deal with the fate of those who had never heard the gospel. All who subscribe the Lausanne Covenant affirm that salvation comes only through Christ, said Chapman,

> ...but we don't all agree when it comes to work out its implications for those who don't have the opportunity to hear the gospel. Others believe...that God must have his own way into the human heart and know where there is genuine evidence of repentance of faith, even when they are not expressed in words.

He cited Jesus' and Paul's use of dialogue and asked: "With these examples before us, is there any reason to be afraid of the word dialogue or to be reluctant to practice it?" Similarly Martin Alphonse, an Indian evangelical pastor and lecturer, supporting Chapman's call for dialogue, feared that the credibility of Christian witness in India was at stake on account of nominal Christianity, denominationalism, and the incompatible lifestyles of Christians. Non-

Christians challenge the Christian claim to exclusive salvation in Christ, he said, claiming that all religions lead to salvation, and urge Christians to work together with people of other faiths. In facing the "breathtakingly impossible" task of evangelizing millions of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists, Christians must enter into "conversational evangelism" with non-Christians, practicing interfaith dialogue in "creative and dynamic ways." They should not seek to "make disciples of all religions" but rather to win individuals for Christ from those religions.

Summary Observations

We began by noting that the growing acceptance of interfaith or interreligious dialogue appears to be a leading cause in bringing about a reduced emphasis on conversion. A careful examination of recent statements by representatives of ecumenical, Roman Catholic, and evangelical mission groups, however, shows that all three, despite major differences in their approach to interfaith dialogue, hold firmly to the conviction that conversion is an essential missionary goal. Yet without question each group now approaches that goal with greater hesitation and circumspection than was true in the period before religious pluralism began to influence missionary thinking, and especially since the rise of global terrorism.

Ecumenical (or Conciliar) Protestants at first resisted adding the new "rules of engagement" for interfaith dialogue to their traditional understanding of evangelism, believing that it might signal a betrayal of their commitment to bold proclamation. Over time, the pleas of Two-Thirds World church leaders and actual practitioners of dialogue convinced them that the risk should be taken. Catholics drew on their own unique heritage of theological development and redefinition to demonstrate that interreligious dialogue must be considered an integral and necessary part of the total process of mission. Gospel proclamation makes explicit the "seeds of the word" and "rays of truth" that are found in other religions. Conversion to Christ then completes the religious pilgrimage on which non-Christian religionists are already embarked. Evangelicals have had the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with interfaith dialogue, believing it to be a threat to pure gospel proclamation. They insist that it be kept subordinate to proclamation and regarded as at best an adjunct to evangelization. Only mounting threats to the safety of missionaries and dangers to indigenous Christians in areas where Islam or Hinduism predominates have caused them to reconsider their ambivalent attitude toward dialogue.

All mission groups must now reaffirm their commitment to work for freedom for evangelization amid the circumstances of religious pluralism, and for the right to freedom of conversion as an essential aspect of Christian mission. Not to do so would constitute a tacit agreement to replace conversion

with interfaith dialogue, and to abandon biblical and apostolic mission for "conversionless Christianity."

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Notes

1. The 1948 United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly establishes the right of religious conversion without penalty or duress.

2. The names of the murdered missionaries are: Australian missionary Graham Staines, with his two sons, Philip and Timothy, in India, January 22, 1999; American missionary pilot Martin Burnham, in the Philippines, June 8, 2002; American missionary nurse Bonnie Witherall, in Lebanon, Nov. 21, 2002; three American missionary hospital workers, employed by the Southern Baptist Convention, in Yemen, December 30, 2002; and four American development workers, employed by the SBC, in Iraq, on March 15, 2004.

3. Cf. Report of Commission on International Religious Freedom (CIRF), Washington, D.C., 2001, p. 27. The summary which follows is based largely on the Annual Report of CIRF.

4. Jongneel 1997:83-84.

5. Visser t'Hooft 1974: 55-75.

6. Ibid.:30.

7. G. Anderson, in *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission,* 1971: 340.

8. Visser t'Hooft 1974:58.

9. Visser t'Hooft 1974: 72.

10. Cf. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 36-41.

11. Burrows 1993:56.This volume contains the entire text of *Redemptoris Missio (RM).*

12. Douglas 1975: 22-36.

13. Ibid: 25.

14. Ibid.:26.

15. Cf. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 253-259.

16. Martin Repp, Current Dialogue 40, 4-5.

17. From the Preamble to the United Nations Charter.

18. Article 18, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. Italics are added for emphasis.

19. The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness, WCC: Geneva, 1996, endnote 14.

20. Ibid., p. 7.

21. These deal especially with relationships between Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Churches, and between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. Cf. *Common Witness* (WCC 1980); *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness* (WCC 1996); *The Evangelical - Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984 (ERCDOM)* (Eerdman's 1986); "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," in *A House Divided* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, n.d.).

22. Cited in *Christianity Today*, Sept. 2003, 51. Stott's statement closely follows the text of *The Evangelical - Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, 1977-84 (ERCDOM),* ed. B. Meeking and J. Stott, 90-91.

23. The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness, p. 7

24. Cf. W. Ariarajah, in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, 1991,* 283.

25. Ariarajah, ibid. 285.

26. The New Delhi Report 1961, (WCC 1962), 84.

27. The Uppsala Report 1968 (WCC: Geneva, 1968), 29.

28. Ibid., 28.

29. Ariarajah, *Ecumenical Review 1997,* 214.

30.Cf. J. Scherer:1987: 127.

31. Scherer 1987: 128.

32. *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975, 44, 45.*

33.*Breking Barriers,* 70.

34. *Breaking Barriers,* 71.

35. Ibid., 72-73.

36. Cf. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 12 - 17.

37. Ibid.:12-13.

38. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 14-17.

39. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 32-34.

40. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 37, 40, 50.

41. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 54-56.

42. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 73 - 79.

43. Scherer-Bevans 1992: 85, 87.

44. Scherer-Bevans 1999: 196-199, 222-225.

45. Cf. Current Dialogue No. 40, WCC, Geneva, Dec. 2002, 16-21

46. Ibid.

47. Burrows 1993: 129-30, citing *Redemption and Mission* (1984). This volume contains the texts of both *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (DP).Cf. Also S. Bevans, IBMR, April 2003, 50-53.

48. Burrows 1993:, 94, 129-130, citing D&M, 13

49. Burrows 1993: 114, citing D&P, 77.

50. *Dei Verbum* (DV), 8, 9 (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)

51. *Nostra Aetate* (NA), 2; *Ad Gentes* (AG), 11 (Declaration On The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, and Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity)

52. Burrows 1993: 100; *DP*, 24, citing *NA*, 2

Six Ways Churches Grow

George G. Hunter III

In the 1960s and 1970s, the "Church Growth" mini-revolution led by Donald McGavran introduced (or reintroduced) five significant perspectives to the world's churches.[1]

- *First, McGavran helped many churches recover their "main business."* That "main business," he asserted, is not merely serving the gathered churches but reaching pre-Christian people and peoples. McGavran declared, "It is God's will that His Church grow, that His lost children be found."

- *Second, he perceived that the chief objective of both evangelism (within a culture) and mission (across cultures) is not merely to "preach" the gospel, or to elicit "decisions" from people, but to make new disciples.* This objective is essentially achieved when people experience two significant life changes: (1) They start following Jesus Christ as Lord, and (2) they are incorporated into some community of the Body of Christ. They may occur in either order!

- *Third, McGavran and his Church Growth colleagues advanced the "strategy" perspective in world mission.* They showed how many mission agencies blindly perpetuated their traditional activities (such as literacy, education, medicine, and agriculture) in the assumption that, of course, their activities were advancing the Great Commission cause. They encouraged reflective agencies to be clearer about their objectives, more self-critical in assessing them, and more strategic, flexible, and innovative in carrying them out.

- *Fourth, McGavran raised the question about "effective evangelism."* He observed that, in evangelism, "we know what *ought* to reach people" (methods like tract distribution, preaching to people in revivals and crusades, or confronting pre-Christian strangers with a memorized presentation). But he asked, "What approaches, methods and ministries, in what kinds of contexts, *actually* reach people, gather harvests, and make new disciples?"

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- *Fifth, Church Growth people employed extensive field research to inform effective mission and evangelism.* As Church Growth field researchers studied hundreds of growing churches in many lands, tongues, and cultures, and as they interviewed thousands of new, they uncovered many principles behind the Christian faith's expansion that would inform Christianity's outreach in unprecedented ways.

Donald McGavran, and his growing army of Church Growth researchers and leaders, discovered the key term "growth" is *not* as simple, and its meaning is not as self-evident, as we used to think. For instance, some Church Growth leaders came to sympathize with their critics' charge that not all "growth" is good, and some growth is even undesirable. For instance, we observed that some growth may be analogous to "fat" – as when a church recruits and welcomes nominal members who are not serious disciples, or when a "low expectation church" is content with its people dutifully "attending church" while the pastor circulates as everyone's "chaplain." A church like any other body has a limit to the amount of "fat" that it can drag along and be healthy. Furthermore, some growth may be analogous to "malignancy" – as when a liberal church welcomes new members who have not turned from non-Christian gods and worldviews, or when a conservative church welcomes people who confuse beliefs with faith, or nationalism with Christianity, or who live more by a legalistic ethic than a love and justice ethic. A church is severely limited in the malignancy it can carry without jeopardizing the whole Body.

The recognition that some "growth" may *not* be desirable has helped us to become clearer about the types that are desirable. Donald McGavran observed, early in his reflections, that Christian movements grow in multiple ways. Collaboration between McGavran, Ralph Winter and Peter Wagner developed the Church Growth field's most essential and enduring paradigm. Churches grow essentially in four ways: Internal Growth, Expansion Growth, Extension Growth, and Bridging Growth. While this typology has endured and has proven perennially useful, our understanding of the types has evolved. With experience and reflection, we can now fine-tune the paradigm in more precise and useful ways.

"Internal" Church Growth

In *Understanding Church Growth*, for instance, McGavran defined Internal Growth as "increase in sub-groups *within existing churches*, i.e., increase of competent Christians...who know the Bible and practice the Christian faith. They move from marginal to ardent belief."[2] Subsequent writers have expanded and "nuanced" our understanding of Internal Growth, and have generated more alternative terms for this type of growth than for any of the other types. McGavran's colleague at Fuller, Alan Tippett, preferred terms like "quality" growth and (especially) "organic" growth. From anthropologist Anthony Wallace, he also imported an emphasis upon the importance of

"revitalization movements" for long-term strength in the churches. Peter Wagner's glossary, in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, described Internal Church Growth as (individual) "Christians growing in their faith and in living out their Christian commitment." He defined the related term "Qualitative Growth" more corporately as "the collective improvement in Christian commitment and ministry among the members of a given local church."[3]

Some of us have used the term to refer to all the ways in which existing churches become more faithful or powerful churches. In *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit*, I suggested that

> Internal Growth refers to the growth in-depth, quality, or vitality of an existing congregation. When the nominal members discover the living Christ and begin following him, when the members are more rooted in scripture or more disciplined in prayer, when the people become more loving or empowered, or more attuned to God's will for peace and justice and finding the lost, then the church is experiencing internal growth.[4]

In the 1970s and 1980s, Church Growth people did not do as much research and writing on Internal Growth as they did on expansion, extension, and bridging growth, largely because the writers in "church renewal" were addressing this challenge as, more recently, the "church health" writers have done. Some Church Growth writers take serious issue, however, with the "renewal" people and the "health" people who advise a church or denomination to become renewed enough, or healthy enough, *first* before getting involved in outreach and mission. That prescription ignores this brute fact: their failure to reach out and lack of involvement in wider mission may well be the reason for their unhealthy state and need of renewal. Church Growth people have long recognized that nothing renews a listless congregation like involvement in wider mission and a stream of converts entering their ranks.

Expansion Church Growth

A local church experiences Expansion Church Growth when new members enter the church's ranks. McGavran gave this category three strategic subdivisions.

- **Biological Growth** occurs when the children of church members come up through the ranks and are received, or confirmed, into the church.

- **Transfer Growth** occurs when the church receives active Christians into its membership from another church, whether a church of its own denomination or another.

- **Conversion Growth** occurs when the church receives new Christians "from the world," or recently restored believers who had no church to transfer from.

In the USA, only about 20 percent of the nation's 360,000 churches are growing, and 19 of the 20 are growing mostly by Biological Growth (sometimes called "Vatican Roulette!") or transfer growth. Less than one percent of our churches are growing substantially from Conversion Growth.

Substantial Expansion Growth

Some churches expand more "substantially" than others. I am defining "substantial" growth as a church *doubling* its membership strength in *ten years*. Such a church might average receiving, in each year of the decade, 13 percent of the church's prior membership as new members – while losing (say) six percent of its prior members to death, transfer, and reversion. So a church that finished last year with 100 members, which receives 13 new members this year while losing six, experiences a seven-percent net growth. A church averaging seven percent *net* growth a year doubles in a decade.

Movemental Expansion Growth

I am further suggesting that a church that doubles its membership strength in five years is experiencing "movemental" growth. Such a church would receive, in a typical year, 20 new members (per 100 previous members) while still losing about six percent of its members. A net growth of 14 percent per year essentially doubles the church's membership strength in five years. These two guidelines, of course, could change with context – lower in a very resistant context, higher in a very receptive context.

Significant Conversion Growth

Furthermore, I am suggesting that the church which is experiencing either substantial or movemental growth is also experiencing significant "conversion" growth if at least a third of the new members are new Christians from the world. One would be tempted to peg that standard higher, but it is experientially important for churches to set goals which, with God's help, they can exceed. More important, churches that bring in many converts also retain more of their kids, and they also attract more transfers – whether they want them or not!

While causal connections are difficult to demonstrate, there are reasons to believe that the Church Growth movement's call to prioritize conversion growth has inspired and guided at least half of the churches in the land who now experience more conversion growth than before. It has also prodded many other churches and church leaders toward a more apostolic orientation.

Extension Church Growth

Extension Church Growth occurs when a local church (or a judicatory or a denomination) "plants" a new church to reach people that the "mother church" (or any other existing church) would like to reach – but cannot reach, in substantial numbers at least, because they are "too far away." The target population may live beyond reasonable traveling distance of the mother church, or they may represent a sub-culture, or a socio-economic class of people, or a dialect, or a condition (such as addiction) that would raise "invisible barriers" that the mother church could not overcome with many of the members. So, traditionally, the mother church (or judicatory) buys some land, underwrites a founding pastor (or, increasingly, a church planting team), deploys some core members from the mother church, builds a first building, etc. (The USA's cities are now becoming so multi-cultural, and even multi-lingual, that much "church planting," even in the mother church's own city, is more essentially "bridging growth" – our next category of growth. Moreover, as we shall see, we now observe so many innovative expressions of the "extension impulse" that we will be expanding the four-fold typology to six.)

When American Church Growth came along in the 1970s, many "mainline" denominations had been propagandized into assuming that church planting was no longer "trendy" – so, despite the country's increasing urbanization, mobile populations, and ethnic immigrations, denominations were planting fewer new churches (per 1000 existing churches) than ever before. The Church Growth movement helped to turn that trend around. By the 1980s, most mainline denominations had doubled or tripled their rate of new church plants. However, though they are still starting churches, they are planting much less than half the new churches they have the opportunity to plant.

Bridging Church Growth

Bridging Church Growth occurs when a church sends cross-cultural missionaries across great language and cultural barriers to establish (or enhance) a Christian movement among a population who are very different from the people of the "sending church." Historically, cross-cultural missionaries also traveled great distances to "foreign nations," and that pattern continues. As the USA becomes the most multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation on earth, however, planting a Christian movement among (say) Latino, Chinese, Russian, Samoan, Tamil, or Hausa people in one's own nation, region, or city involves most of the dynamics of cross-cultural mission. Since the 1970s, the Church Growth movement has championed the continuing cross-cultural mission of the nation's churches. Considering the fact that some 10,000 of the earth's (approximately) 30,000 "peoples" (numbering more than two billion people, speaking several thousand languages or mutually unintelligible dialects) still have no indigenous evangelizing church within their ranks, the church executives who once called for a "moratorium" on sending missionaries were, apparently, not familiar with even the most elementary demographic facts that would inform a decision on the matter! Nevertheless, mission's detractors

sensitized many churches to send no more old-school "colonial" type missionaries who had not adequately distinguished between Christianity and Western "civilization," who were scripted to impose "Western ways" and call it Christian mission. The call, today, is for more incarnational missionaries, who identify with the host cultures, and work with the people to develop indigenous Christianity. The Church Growth movement's achievement, in advocating the sending of contextually-appropriate missionaries, is mixed. Overall, with slight fluctuation, the "independent" mission agencies are sending more and more missionaries, while the mainline denominational agencies are sending fewer and fewer. Rodney Stark, a leading sociologist of religion, explains:

> The liberal American denominations...have become essentially irrelevant to the American foreign mission effort. In 1880, the liberals – Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians – provided more than nine missionaries out of every ten sent abroad from the United States.... By 1935, the liberals supplied fewer than half of the American missionaries.... In 1996, they sent out fewer than one out of 20 of those registered with official mission boards.[5]

"Catalytic" Church Growth

It may be time for the Church Growth field's most perennially useful paradigm to experience some "expansion growth" of its own. The simple reason is that the established four types of Church Growth, even with the embellishment of the years, do not sufficiently account for much of the church's growth that we can now observe. However, with the classical four, two more categories can help us account for most of that growth. After an exhaustive search for the right terms, I find myself calling the two new types "Catalytic Growth" and "Proliferation Growth." So, instead of four, I am suggesting that the church grows essentially in six ways:

1. Internal Growth
2. Expansion Growth
3. **Catalytic Growth**
4. **Proliferation Growth**
5. Extension Growth
6. Bridging Growth

"Catalytic" growth refers to a distinctive, powerful, even infectious dynamic that we can often observe when a church is experiencing "movemental" expansion growth (doubling in five years), and that we usually observe when Christianity becomes a wider contagious movement. I am employing the term as a metaphor – borrowed from the physical sciences, especially Chemistry, in which a "catalyst" increases the rate in a chemical reaction. So in a crisis, for instance, a surge of adrenalin catalyzes the body for

"fight or flight." Similarly, Creatine, ingested before resistance exercise, catalyzes the body's production of ATP – which powers two or three more bench presses, which catalyzes more muscle growth. I am told that the "cocktail" of multiple supplements and drugs that HIV patients now receive is designed to catalyze the body's immune system in multiple ways. From the earliest apostolic movement, something like "catalysis" is prominent and potent in contagious Christian movements. The dynamic, like Internal Growth, is more qualitative than quantitative and may overlap with one or more of McGavran's four types.

The catalytic principle is often involved as the faith spreads within a family, clan, or peer group. Consider a typical case. A forty year old man, from a secular, unchurched extended family and long addicted to alcohol, was detoxed and began recovery at Hazelden He continued in "Twelve Step" recovery at a "half-way" house for six months, then moved back home. A friend who had once boozed with him but was now in recovery invited him to a church in his city that features a large sign – "Recovery Spoken Here." The church welcomed him. He felt wanted and "at home." In one of the church's Twelve Step meetings, he discovered that the "Higher Power" he had opened to at Hazelden was the Holy Spirit, who now pointed him to Christ, who reconciled him to the Father. While he still carried some of the marks of "the far country," he was so profoundly changed that his family and work peers were astonished. They attended his baptismal service and were deeply moved. The church reached out to his family, friends, and peers. Within a year, 30 were baptized as new Christians. When people observe miracles that they cannot deny or account for, that experience often catalyzes interest, or receptivity, or even active seeking.

My book, *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism*, demonstrates the indispensable presence of the catalytic factor in many, if not most, of history's great Christian movements, and that the apostles knew this, as well as later figures such as St. Patrick and John Wesley. My thesis suggests that (presumably) in every society, there is a regular or "establishment" population, and there are also "fringe" populations ("down-and-outers" and "up-and-outers") whom the establishment people regard as "impossible" or "hopeless." In first century Galilee, for instance, the marginalized and allegedly "hopeless" populations included lepers, blind people, deaf people, the possessed and the paralytics, as well as tax collectors ("traitors") and zealots ("terrorists"). Much of Jesus' visible public ministry was to such populations. This point was not lost on the disciples who became apostles. Many of the apostles reached populations widely regarded as impossible, even (so called) "barbarians," and even cannibal populations. The second-century apostolic traditions, for instance, tell us that Andrew reached the Scythians – who were widely regarded as more animal than human. Matthew, at the cost of his life, planted the gospel seed in the land of the anthropophagi (cannibals). But the story doesn't end there. Following Matthew's execution, the king converted and led many of his people into the apostolic faith.

In recent history, one of our doctoral students in Mission at Asbury has led such a movement. Vasile Talos was the leader of the Baptist Church in Romania for ten years – in a period that included the late struggles under Communism as well as the first years following Communism's demise. He enrolled in one of our doctoral programs. One day, while reading for History of Mission in a carrel in our library, a thought occurred to him: "The Gypsies matter to God." To some degree, Vasile had shared in Europe's wide prejudice toward the Gypsies, in Europe's wide assumption that Gypsies are "hopeless." When he returned home, he sold his denomination on a mission to Gypsies. Today, there are about 90 Gypsy Baptist congregations in Romania. Observing their changed lives and neighborhoods, many cultural Romanians have been attracted to a church that cares enough and dares enough to serve Gypsies. Thus, by reaching Gypsies, the Baptists have reached more "regular" Romanians as well.

The conversion of "unlikely" people does not catalyze all of the "regular people" into receptivity. For instance, I have interviewed people in Romania who felt less receptive toward the Baptists now that they reach Gypsies. But some, often many, are catalyzed into "seekers," and these are typically the "regular' people who'd be most useful to the Christian movement – people less inhibited and less inclined to cling to any status attached to class or ethnicity, more altruistic in personality and more inclined to give themselves in Kingdom service.

"Proliferation" Church Growth

If "catalytic" growth refers to an infectious *dynamic* we usually see in growing Christian movements, "proliferation" growth refers to the *structural* innovations we observe even more often in growing churches and movements. I am not using the term merely in the sense of the increase or multiplication of something as, in geo-politics, we refer to "nuclear proliferation." I am using "proliferation," metaphorically, from the term's use in Botany. Much of plant life obviously grows by scattering seeds near (extension growth) and far (bridging growth), and a young plant *can* grow (expansion growth) in such a way that – like a young cat, a year later you can tell that it's the same organism, only bigger.

Many plants, however, also grow by "proliferation." For instance, some growing trees produce new roots, new cells, new buds, new shoots, new branches, new limbs, new twigs, new leaves, and they can thereby so proliferate that the mature plant may not particularly resemble the same plant when it was much younger. A tree might even extend its root system for many yards and, finding water and fertile soil, emerge vertically once again into the sun, appearing as a solitary young tree – you'd have to dig to perceive that it is an extension of the first tree. Most animals, once beyond the embryo stage, including humans, can do nothing like any of this. Most of us have the same number of cells, arms, and other body parts we had at birth. But some plants grow through proliferation, and much of such a plant's growth comes through,

and not without, the changes that proliferation brings about. I am told that if you plant Bermuda grass, or asparagus, or bamboo, its subterranean spread over time will be so extensive that you cannot later get rid of it! I am told that if a branch of a willow tree barely touches the water of the nearby pond or lake, it will send down, from the branch, a new root system, which will then spread and send up (apparently) new young trees. My Asian Indian students tell me that their sub-continent's Banyan tree grows extensively like this. Plant one Banyan tree in a pond and, in time, its spreading root system produces what looks like a thicket of trees. Much of the plant world, in many ways, dramatizes "proliferation growth."

We first observed the need for such a category when we saw local churches starting alternative congregations within the existing church. These were *not* merely like a second worship service, like the old Sunday evening service became before it died. They were actual, alternative congregations, with their own leaders, liturgy, links, and life beyond gathering for worship. In the USA, for example, we observed churches starting "contemporary" congregations to reach the "Baby Boom" generation who, in significant numbers, could not relate to the traditional 11:00 congregation. Later, similar congregations emerged to reach and serve "post-modern" "Generation X" people.

Then some churches started proliferating congregations to serve people with different schedules, temperaments, or aesthetic tastes. At this writing for instance, Hollywood's First Presbyterian Church features four Sunday congregations: a "Contemplative Service" meets at 8:30 AM in the church's chapel; a "Classic Service" meets at 9:30 in the sanctuary; a CUE (Contemporary Urban Experience) service meets a block away at 10:45 in a renovated warehouse; and a "Celebration Service" meets at 11:00 in the sanctuary. Again, in Jim Jackson's years as senior pastor of Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, the church has transitioned from two services averaging a total of 900 people per Sunday to "a congregation of congregations" – now involving 2800 people per weekend in one of six distinct congregations. Other churches are proliferating "campuses" to serve people in different regions of their metropolitan area. So Willow Creek Community Church, in addition to featuring four "seeker services" and two "Gen X" services per weekend, and "New Community" (believer's) services on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, has planted satellite "campuses" in Wheaton, North Shore, and McHenry County. Each campus has its own ministries, small groups network, "campus pastor" and staff, and some live worship, while services from the (original) South Barrington campus are videocast to the satellite congregations.

Meanwhile, churches from Singapore, to Hong Kong, to Kuala Lumpur are "doing church" in a half-dozen (or more) languages. Churches in Romania provide alternative congregations for Gypsies, and other congregations for deaf people. Increasing numbers of churches in Western Europe and North America now feature congregations of, by, and for homeless people, as well as congregations for street kids, people in recovery, and ex-prisoners and their families.

We have observed the most audacious expression of this principle in the proliferation of "outreach ministries." Once upon a time, not so long ago, almost all churches offered pre-Christian people two options: "come to church" or "come to Sunday school." (The occasional youth ministry or women's circle also reached some people.) The worship service and the Sunday School were the two "front doors" that were supposed to welcome and include all seekers. In many churches today, however, more people are essentially being reached through the proliferation of "side door" outreach ministries to an incredible range of populations – including recovery ministries for addictive people, and support groups for a range of hurting and struggling people, as well as ministries with homeless people, street kids, single moms and their children, people with a mental illness, immigrants, elderly people, prisoners and their families, people with handicaps, blind people, deaf people, pre-literate people, people needing to learn English as a second language, and many others. I am told that First Assembly of God, Phoenix has become the most rapidly growing church of its denomination through more than 200 outreach ministries.

Outreach ministries are almost always ministries of the laity. Indeed, most outreach ministries are conceived by entrepreneurial laity who are concerned for some specific population. Most outreach ministries become effective through a basic "marketing" strategy: a) the leaders identify an underserved population; b) they work to understand the target population; c) they develop one or more ministries to engage them; d) they interpret and offer the ministry to the target population. Many outreach ministries catalyze interest in people beyond, sometimes far beyond, the target population. For instance, when a church helps a gambling addict find freedom, it often reaches the addict's whole family, and many people are magnetically attracted to a church that cares enough to sign its service for deaf people.

The "proliferation growth" described in the preceding paragraphs cannot be understood as "extension growth." The churches that multiply congregations and outreach ministries are not (usually) buying land, assigning a church-planting pastor (or team), or engaging in most of the other activities usually associated with "church planting" (although the satellite congregations resemble church plants). For instance, the twelve congregations of Wesley Methodist Church, Singapore (four "traditional," four "prayer and praise," one Filipino, one Mandarin, and two Korean congregations) are all congregations of Wesley Church – one church, with many congregations, and each congregation with many classes, groups, and ministries. Such churches grow *as* they "proliferate" new cells, offshoots, branches, "underground" extensions and outreach ministries of the existing church. The Body of Christ grows like a tree!

We should make explicit that in local Christian movements, as they are fueled by the proliferation of structures and ministries, evangelistic contacts also proliferate. Leaders and other people involved in new congregations, groups, and ministries invite many people to join them. More of the active Christians, with many of the new Christians, initiate ministry and conversation with pre-Christian people; more pre-Christian people are contacted and invited; and more Christians contact more pre-Christian people more times. This is significant for

no more profound reason than most people do not respond the first time they are contacted or invited; many pre-Christian people respond only after they are contacted and invited many times.

Proliferation Growth often overlaps with McGavran's four types. Just as a tree growing through proliferation must grow more and deeper roots, so growing churches must experience greater Internal Growth. And they experience it through, and not without, proliferation. For instance, they proliferate many opportunities (and types of opportunities) for people to study the Scriptures. For example, one church features all of the following: Bible Study in many Sunday School classes; several types of Bible Study groups; and a church-wide study on the book the pastor is preaching from this month or season. Besides these, it challenges people with high expectation studies like the Bethel Bible Series and the Disciple Bible Study, and it hosts the extension campus of a regional seminary, which makes it's courses in Scripture available to church members. Likewise, many churches take a redundant approach to Spiritual Formation. The opportunities proliferate far beyond *the* Wednesday night prayer meeting and the one page of *The Upper Room* (devotional guide) for the day to other options ranging from a dozen weekly prayer meetings, to "soul friends," spiritual formation groups, retreats, pilgrimages to holy places, Eucharistic services, and intercession ministries.

Expansion Growth more often happens through Proliferation than without it. When traditional church leaders wish for growth, their expectation does not usually range beyond, say, seeing more people in our one 11:00 worship service, or seeing more children in Mrs. Crenshaw's fifth grade Sunday School class. *If* the church experiences significant new growth, however, most of the growth will be achieved through the proliferation of multiple worshiping congregations and Sunday School classes (and multiple Sunday School sessions), many other small groups, large groups, ministries, and outreach ministries – and perhaps even multiple campuses.

Extension Growth is, increasingly, incorporating a proliferation paradigm. More and more new churches plan from the start to reach many people through many groups and ministries, and through multiple congregations. Furthermore, Bridging Growth is becoming more proliferative. More and more churches support the denomination's missionaries, while also supporting para-church missionaries, and their church's own missionaries, not to mention deploying many teams of laypersons in short term missions each year.

"Proliferation Growth" represents a paradigm that is not already present and operative in the minds of most traditional church leaders. We have already seen, for instance, that local church leaders who *want* growth usually think only of making their one congregation larger. Unlike the tree, which is genetically encoded to proliferate – with an inborn capacity to, say, extend its roots toward moist rich soil or adapt to a changing climate, proliferation does not "come naturally" to humans. The perceived opportunity to grow through proliferation comes, for Christian leaders, through learning. And any specific expression of the principle, like a new congregation for deaf people, must first

be imagined, planned, resourced, marketed, staffed, managed, and improved through reflection upon experience. You have to imagine and manage it to achieve it.

Furthermore, most traditional church leaders operate with the value of "efficiency" foremost in their minds, and when "efficiency" occupies a leader's mind, it crowds out "proliferation." For example, "Why start another congregation? The one 11:00 service we have now is not full!" When we implement Proliferation Growth, however, it sets up shop on "both sides" of "efficiency." On one side, it is enormously more efficient than a traditional one-congregation church. With multiple congregations sharing the same space, and multiple outreach ministries housed in, or moving out from, the same space, the church is "maximizing" its facilities and personnel much more efficiently, and cost-effectively, than we observe in traditional churches. On the other side of efficiency, a proliferation strategy may not wait until what the church is already doing is "full" or even self-supporting. It moves toward opportunity as soon as God gives the leaders a new group, ministry, or congregation will require.

In churches hoping to transition "from tradition to mission," we typically meet one entrenched barrier to growth through proliferation. It is usually expressed like this: "We can't start another service; our pastor (or staff) already feels overworked." Traditional leaders still assume that the pastor (and staff) are paid to do most of the ministry that matters. So, of course, they would have to do any outreach ministries as well. But how can they be asked to do that when they are already courting burnout? Proliferation growth will usually depend, enormously, on a contrasting assumption: God wants to entrust most of the ministry that matters to laypeople, whom God has gifted and called for ministry within and beyond the congregation. Contagious Christian movements are lay movements, and lay movements grow through, and not without, proliferation. Since lay Christian movements need (healthy) pastors, growth may depend upon proliferating teaching pastors and other staff as needed; however, their focus is not upon "doing ministry" as much as "leading and feeding" everyone else's ministry!

The proliferation analogy, drawn from botany, can suggest some of the interventions in which leaders can engage to increase a church's health, reach, and growth. For instance, a church could discern, in every season, where in the wider community it is called to "branch out," or extend roots, or scatter seeds. Again, the leaders can identify the branches and limbs that are dying, or no longer bearing fruit, and prune them to send energy to other parts of the tree that can have a more productive future. Leaders can even choose to prune some healthy lower limbs in order redirect growth upward and attain the desired vision!

"Proliferation Growth" is a new paradigm for understanding, beyond McGavran's four types, many of the ways the church grows, but not all. When, say, a church's Korean congregation votes to leave, and acquire land, and relocate, and change their name, is that "proliferation growth" or "extension growth?" This promising classification will not account for all of the ways the church grows, nor will catalytic growth, but they nevertheless provide two new paradigms that will inform the growth of churches in many new ways.

The Case of the Inuit Christian Movement

The promotional ministries of Roger Armbruster (www.canadaawakening.com) and the opening segment of the "Transformations II" video (www.sentinelgroup.org) have alerted much of the Christian world to a Christian movement among the Inuit aboriginal peoples of the North American Arctic. The Inuit people (sometimes called "Eskimos") number about 125,000 people – scattered, in seacoast villages of 300 to 2000 people, across much of Arctic Canada, Alaska, Greenland, and Russia. The first (known) seed for their movement was planted in the late nineteenth century when an Inuit shaman, Anwadeeswak, learned through a vision that a man would one day bring news of a Son of God to the Inuit. In the late 1920s, when the Church Mission Society (of The Church of England) sent Canon John Turner to Pond Inlet, Canada as their first missionary to an Inuit people, Anwadeeswak's grandsons recognized the missionary from what they recalled of their grandfather's prophesy! In the decade before his untimely death, Turner built a solid church in Pond Inlet, while planting seeds in neighboring Arctic communities. In time, the Church Mission Society sent missionaries and planted churches in most of the communities of Arctic Canada. Through the later itineration (by plane) of Rev. John Spillenaar in the late 1960s through the 1980s, the Full Gospel Church also planted many Inuit congregations. Today, David Ellyatt has succeeded Spillenaar in leading the Arctic Missionsagency (www.arcticmissions.com), which takes teams of laity into Arctic communities each summer to join indigenous Christians in building or expanding church facilities.

Church Growth in both the Anglican and the Full Gospel traditions proceeded slowly until the mid-1990s – when a Gospel movement broke out in Pond Inlet (and, rather concurrently, in several other communities) and spread within months to many other Inuit communities. In September, 2003 I attended a conference of more than 300 Inuit Christian people from 35 communities across Arctic Canada, which met in Baker Lake, Nunavut Territory, Canada. One purpose in my visit was to test the validity and usefulness of my two hypotheses, through observations in Baker Lake and interviews with church leaders from other communities. Both hypotheses seem to be confirmed, but from different directions.

The Inuit Christian movement substantially fits the Catalytic growth paradigm. Indeed, I have alluded to the fact that news of the movement's breakout in Pond Inlet, followed by visits from Pond Inlet Christians to other communities, catalyzed interest in many of the other Inuit communities. Many non-Inuit Canadians regard Inuits like many Europeans regard Gypsies, so news of an Awakening among this allegedly "hopeless" population has triggered a wider curiosity.

In Pond Inlet itself, some 80 percent of the community's people were addicted to a range of substances from alcohol to gasoline fumes; crime, child abuse, wife abuse, depression, and suicide also scourged the town. Several addicts experienced faith and the church served as their de facto recovery community. The church reached out to other addicts, who also responded, and to addicts' families and friends. When the sober pre-Christian townspeople saw these allegedly "hopeless" people leading new lives, many of them sought the Grace with that kind of Power. I was told that the growth of churches in at least a dozen of Canada's Arctic communities was catalyzed by this same dynamic.

I was told that many of these Arctic communities have been rather "lawless," like the old American West. Wild violence-prone young men, who often abuse women and children, who fight and even kill, threaten a community's peace. One young man, who spoke one evening at the Baker Lake conference, reported that he was "the worst" such man in his town; when he accepted Christ and a new life, several of his peers followed, and other people were so impressed by these obvious miracles in their midst that they responded. Most of these communities are much safer and more peaceful since the Awakening hit town!

Suicide can become epidemic in Arctic communities; some communities lose one percent of their people to suicide in a given year. The mayor of one community, a nominal Christian and a very competent leader, reported that his community experienced one suicide a month for two years. He tried everything he had learned in leadership, management, and human relations training, but the monthly suicides continued, "like clockwork." In desperation, he knew that he needed the Holy Spirit's power; the change in him catalyzed a revival in the town, and the suicide epidemic ceased.

While my "catalytic growth" theory seemed validated by these (and other) cases, I found less evidence for the "proliferation growth" theory. People from several communities reported that their Awakening empowered the church members for more outreach, to more people, more times. One woman reflected that she'd been invited to churches twice in her earlier life. "Now, suddenly, many friends were inviting me, and inviting me again. Something told me God might be in this!" But no one reported new groups, or new ministries, or new congregations; they still had one worshiping congregation per Sunday. One day, when I interviewed people in Baker Lake's general store, three people said they were, or had been, interested in being involved in one of Baker Lake's four churches, but when they visited "there was no room for me," or they heard by the grapevine that "the church is full now; no more room." People attending the conference from at least six churches reflected that their church was now "full" most Sundays. Then it occurred to me that this is a probable reason why some of these local movements, which exploded several years ago, have "plateaued" in more recent years. As I visited Baker Lake's four churches, I estimated their total seating capacity to be only 275 to 300. So if every church were full in its one service each Sunday, there would be no room for at least 1500 of Baker Lake's 1800 people.

Many church leaders would suggest that, if these Inuit Christian movements are to continue growing, they will have to plant more churches; I was told that, however, that with the need to import most materials and specialized labor, the cost of building more churches is more than prohibitive, and that the Arctic Missions agency cannot build or expand enough one-service-per-Sunday churches to keep up with the growth that is possible. In Inuit communities, therefore, "proliferation growth" is much more feasible than "extension growth." With the Inuits' distinctive tribal community ethos, I was told that no churches have a precedent for adding a second congregation; "We love for everyone to be together." Like many churches in many cultures who are used to "the one worship service," Inuit Christianity's leaders will have to weigh the tradeoffs and consider the proliferation paradigm. (Some traditional communities, in other cultural regions of the earth, have "sandwiched" a lengthy fellowship period for everyone between the first and second service.) If they do not proliferate congregations within their churches, soon, many receptive people will not be reached, the movement will lose momentum, the churches will have missed the day of the people's visitation, and their glorious movement will become a glorious memory.

Notes

1. This paper was originally presented to The American Society for Church Growth, New Orleans, November 8, 2003.

2. Donald A. McGavran. *Understanding Church Growth*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) 100.

3. C. Peter Wagner, ed. *Church Growth: State of the Art* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986) 292, 298.

4. G. Hunter III, To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987) 32.

5. Rodney Stark, "Efforts to Chirstianize Europe, 400-2000," *Journal of Contemporary Religion"* (Volume 16, Number 1, January 2001) 118.

Church Planting in Theological Education

Ed Stetzer

Church planting is on the mind of North American Christians. A Google™ search on "church planting" produces 107,000 web pages. Thousands of churches and ministries are concentrating on planting new congregations. Even Christian educational institutions – both evangelical and mainline – are getting on board.

While serving as a professor of church planting, I received a survey from Church Growth researcher, Charles Arn. The aim of the survey was to quantify the available resources focused on church planting in theological education. Later, after a holdup due to personnel changes at a partner school, Charles encouraged me to continue the survey. After some small changes, I resent the survey to schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools, the American Association of Bible Colleges, and the Transnational Association of Colleges and Schools. Seventy-two schools representing an array of faith convictions returned the questionnaire. Though they provided a wide range of responses, one trend stood out: the development of new classes and church planting centers.

Patterns of Church Planting Programs

Church planting training at academic institutions embraces many approaches. Cognizance of the field traverses a broad continuum too. Instead of church "planting," one school thought the survey was about church "planning." However, other colleges and seminaries described full-fledged church planting centers and specialized degrees in church planting. Most schools fell in between.

Schools without Specific Programs

Thirty-two percent of the responding schools did not have a church planting course, seminar, or track. Some had alternatives. Some offered no options at all for church planting training. Since it seems reasonable to assume that schools were more likely to respond if they had a program, no doubt more could be added to the "no options" list.

From the returned questionnaires, we learn that, in some cases, church planting training is seen as the denomination's job, not the seminary's. For instance, Trinity Seminary in Columbus, Ohio explained that church planting happens through the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) Division

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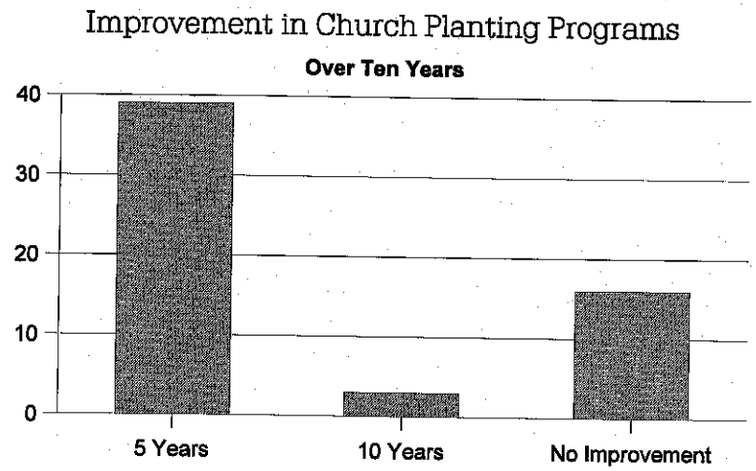
for Outreach. So, "training new mission pastors would likely happen in Chicago at the ELCA church wide office."

Among the colleges, some think church planting is best carried out at the graduate level. Some without specific courses in church planting, nevertheless, include it as a component in other offerings. North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois combines evangelism and church planting. They occasionally use church planting "videos produced in-house by the Evangelical Covenant Church's director of church planting." Some colleges have recently added specific church planting classes. Most were added in the last five years. The graph below shows this emerging trend.

Connected with Other Groups

There are also instances of schools teaming up with outside people, churches, groups, or denominations to offer new church development programs on their campuses. Some schools highlighted connections with visionary church planting churches. One example is Lancaster Bible College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which reported:

> We have a church planting program . . . [that] is currently being completely revised. We are moving forward on an intensive partnership with visionary churches who want to plant a daughter church. Students will partner with that church with the intention of becoming the pastor of the church plant.



Dallas Christian College in Dallas, Texas partners with World Impact, "an organization that establishes churches in the inner city/urban context." They also

work with local churches that are planting new congregations.

Church Planting Centers

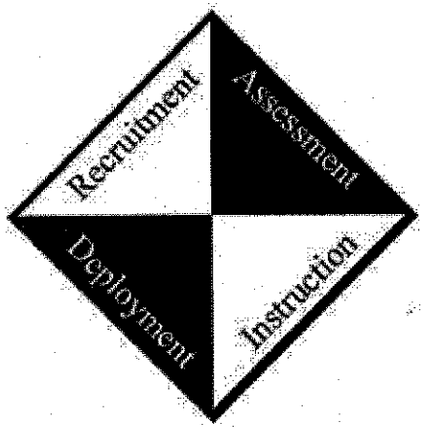
Many schools have adopted church planting centers. The most prominent example is at Southern Baptist related seminaries. Each Southern Baptist Seminary has a full-time church planting professor who is jointly appointed by the North American Mission Board (the SBC mission agency focused on North America) and the individual seminary. This falls under the umbrella of the Nehemiah Project, of which I am currently director. As the project manual explains:

> The Nehemiah Project is a cooperative strategy that links Southern Baptist churches, associations, state conventions and Canada, training institutions, and the North American Mission Board to intentionally prepare church planters to plant healthy, reproducing churches.

Nehemiah Project Church Planting Centers include:

- *Recruitment*: Ongoing recruitment of church planters takes place in chapel, through special events, and through other means.

- *Assessment*: Students interested in church planting are brought though an assessment process – a minimum of a four-hour behavioral interview exploring the individual wiring and call to church planting.



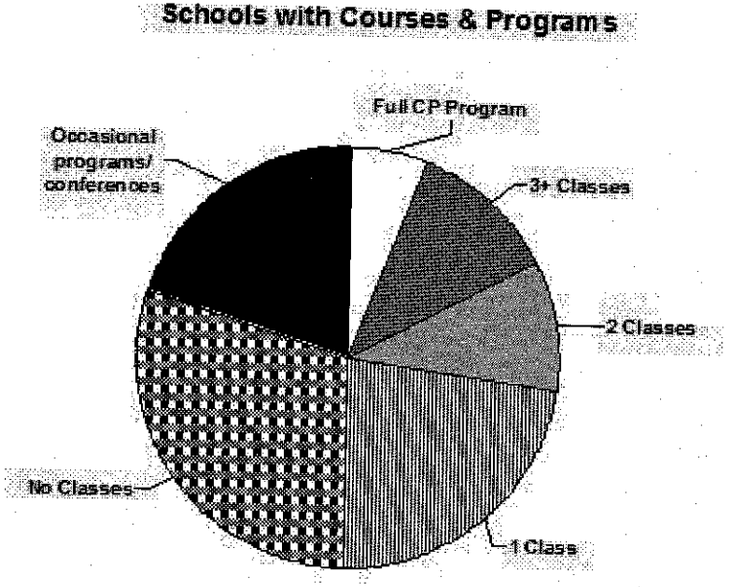
- *Instruction*: Nehemiah professors / directors teach multiple church planting courses focused on North America. All Nehemiah Project church planters must take Introduction to Church Planting, Methods of Church Planting, and participate in a church planting internship.

- *Deployment*: Center directors help students get placed in church planting positions available within the denomination.

Some schools offer Nehemiah Partnership Centers, that is, they use Nehemiah Project materials even though they are not Southern Baptist. For example, Columbia International University in Columbia, South Carolina (and about 20 other schools) use the Nehemiah Partnership materials and, in return, share the names of potential church planters interested in planting SBC churches. However, other schools have developed their own centers.

Under the direction of Steve Childers, Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida partners with the US Center for Church Planting. Childers serves both as director of the Center and as a professor at Reformed. Their center is "certified" by the Presbyterian Church of America as an assessment and training center for their church planters. Similarly, Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, reports that the school's church planting center (North American Division Evangelism Institute) "is now looked upon as the church planting resource center for the denomination in North America."

A few schools with church planting centers include church planting as part of their core curriculum. For instance, every student at the Canadian Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta is required to take a church planting class.



Class Offerings

Perhaps the most comprehensive church planting curriculum is at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. Their courses include: North American Church Planting Exercise, Church Planting: Biblical and Strategic Foundations; Developing a Church Plant Methodology; Practicum in North American Church Planting; Evangelism and Church Planting with a Non-Evangelical Context; Preaching for the North American Church Planter; Pastoral Ministry for the Church Planter; Music in Church Planting; Counseling for the Church Planter; Church Plants in the New Testament; and Spiritual Renewal in Church Plants. Southeastern and several other schools offer Master of Divinity degrees with concentrations in church planting. One program lets students to do two years of work on campus and complete the remaining "year" on the field or in a series of short on-campus modules.

Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi provides a class where students research their field as part of the church planting process. The description goes:

> Research on the field with the view of actually establishing a local church in the future. Includes survey, demographic, and contact work with evaluation.

Some schools are more culturally focused than others. For instance, Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois offers classes on both "Global Church Planting" and "North American Church Planting." However, some other schools still combine international and domestic church planting in in an introductory class.

Keys to Success

The strongest programs tend to be at larger institutions, but this is not universally so. More importantly, almost all strong programs depend on a point person for promotion – either a professor or a local church leader. An example is Ken Davis, Director of Church Planting for Baptist Bible College and Seminary in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. He leads an annual church planting conference, oversees internships, and more. Some schools involve outside ministry leaders. Emmanuel Bible College in Kitchener, Ontario uses an adjunct instructor, Glenn Gibson, who is involved as a mentor and coach for church planters. Gibson works for an umbrella organization in Canada called Outreach Canada. Outreach Canada runs seminars and a church planter's boot camp on Emmanuel's campus. Schools with leaders assigned to promote, recruit, teach, and help place church planters have the most successful programs.

Another key is having a distinct identity on campus. For instance, church planting centers are usually a part of the missions or Church Growth department, but they have some separate identity and sponsor events. These events encourage students to consider getting involved in church planting.

Conclusion

There is a tremendous interest in church planting today. Christian colleges and seminaries are beginning to recognize that many of their students are not interested in the traditional pastoral route. They are being challenged by an emerging on North America as a mission field, and they want to attend schools that will equip them for this increasingly common form of ministry.

If your school wishes to participate in the survey, you may still do so and the database will be updated. To participate, send an e-mail to estetzer@namb.net. Schools wishing to start a church planting program may wish to contact me at nehemiah@namb.net to learn more.

Evangelistic Preaching for the New Millennium

Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison

The mere mention of evangelistic preaching either thrills or chills clergy. Some embrace the prospect with gusto as they envisage church growth, conversion, and the challenge of reaching the unchurched. Others view evangelistic preaching as a garish manipulation of people into faith through emotional appeals.

We would like to offer a modest proposal for breaking that impasse.[1] We recommend a view of evangelistic preaching that centers on the community instead of the preacher.

This cuts against the grain of nearly every book written on evangelistic preaching. Most books consider the evangelistic sermon out of context, as if it occurred in a vacuum. The clearest examples are books of collected evangelistic sermons that focus on various biblical texts but ignore audience and context.[2] The implication is that evangelistic preachers are the primary evangelists and that the community need not enter the purview of the consummate expression of the great commission – the evangelistic sermon.

A few resources on evangelistic preaching acknowledge that people do hear these sermons and that such hearers live in a particular social location. For instance, in *Evangelistic Preaching That Connects,* Craig Loscalzo's opening chapter has a section on the need to discern "Contemporary Contexts for Evangelism and Preaching." Still, these three or four pages are slight in comparison with the bulk of the book – 160 pages that analyze evangelistic preaching methods and models (i.e., model evangelistic sermons).[3]

An exception to the trend of focusing almost entirely on the preacher as evangelizer is a chapter entitled, "Evangelism as Proclamation" in Darius Salter's *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice.* Salter recognizes that evangelistic preaching never happens "in isolation from a real live congregation." He advises, therefore, the preacher consider specific people within the congregation while he or she is preparing the evangelistic sermon: "The rigor of preparation is never done in a vacuum, but is surrounded by people's faces, voices, frowns, smiles, and sheer bewilderment."[4] Nonetheless, Salter fails to consider the role of the nonpreachers in the evangelistic sermon, not as hearers or recipients but as actors, as the embodiment of evangelistic preaching which lends courage, a Christian tenor, and credibility to evangelistic preaching.

What are we suggesting? On what can both foes and friends of evangelistic preaching agree? Friends of evangelistic preaching ought to recognize the community of faith, not just the preacher, is indispensable to evangelistic preaching; foes ought to engage the possibility that evangelistic preaching can be compelling if it happens as an outgrowth of a lively Christian community. We are suggesting, therefore, that the essential but neglected element of evangelistic preaching is the

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community, not only as the hearers of the message (as Salter presents them) but even more as actors who make ready and visible the message. The community of faith preexists the evangelistic sermon, situates the evangelistic sermon in a context of praise and worship, and tangibly embodies the Good News in both the community and the world.

The Community as Evangelist

It is hardly surprising that North American books on evangelistic preaching overlook the community within which evangelistic preaching takes place. One sociologist of American society has argued that "all American values point to a central constellation: the value of the individual personality."[5] As a consequence, Evangelism tends to be seen as the appeal of one individual to another individual. This emphasis is obvious in the more popular evangelistic models, such as. friendship/personal evangelism, lifestyle evangelism, and televangelism, which targets an individual alone watching an individual televangelist, who appeals for the conversion of the individual in the privacy of his or her room. Although it might make sense to exploit this cultural tendency, as one seeks to inculturate evangelism in North America, such individualization may also be myopic and, therefore, limited both in effectiveness and fidelity to the Christian tradition.

An important complement to a one-sided, individualistic understanding of evangelism can be garnered from the writings of Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder, who recasts evangelism as a communal activity. While Yoder grants that "each individual must make his [or her] decision about whether to respond in obedient faith to this message or to reject it,"[6] he tries as well to redress the balance between individual and community – over against North American preoccupation with the individual. He underscores that the community preexists the evangelistic sermon and that this community is to embody the Good News.

This focus on the communal context of evangelistic preaching accords remarkably well with the early Christian conception of evangelism as Luke presents it in the book of Acts. Take Pentecost, for example. Peter does not stand up to speak alone; on the contrary, his sermon is the climax of communal events that testify to the power of God. What are those experiences? They begin with unified prayer: "All these [the apostles] were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women [Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis adds "and children!"], including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (Acts 1:14). They were together at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on each one of them (2:4). The result of this prayer and spiritual infilling was the ability to declare "God's deeds of power" (1:11) in languages that were comprehensible to various ethnic groups. Peter's evangelistic sermon is not the preaching of an individual evangelist in isolation. Rather, when Peter declares, "Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose...," he intends to explain from the prophet, Joel, a remarkable series of communal experiences to his hearers. In short, Peter as the first evangelist is acting as *interpreter of the community!* He is responding – as he stands symbolically *with the eleven, rather than alone (2:14)* – to observers who want to know the meaning of the community's extraordinary experience!

Peter's sermon at Pentecost provides a model of evangelistic preaching. According to this model, evangelistic preaching arises from and serves to explain the remarkable experience of a true Christian community devoting itself to prayer (1:14) and to testifying to the mighty acts of God (2:11). The lesson for us is obvious: if the church lives a life of devotion and proclamation, evangelistic preaching will arise naturally and genetically from its communal source. Evangelistic preaching ought to explain the vitality of the church's experience, the ongoing life of devotion it exercises, God's blessings in response, and the church's uncanny ability to proclaim God's wonderful deeds of power. The community, in other words, provides the substance and occasion of evangelistic preaching.

This understanding of evangelistic preaching places the onus rather more on the character of the community than on the rhetorical abilities of the individual communicator. Therefore, Yoder stresses the need for distinct communities that embody the Good News by their lifestyle of love for their own members and their enemies, their willingness to undergo suffering, their distaste for power, their commitment to peaceful resolutions, and their embrace of a diverse social composition. The community is "not only a vehicle of the gospel or only a fruit of the gospel; it is the Good News."[7] The church as a distinctive community is foundational to evangelism because

> there can be no procedure of proclamation without a community, distinct from the rest of society, to do the proclaiming. Pragmatically it is just as clear there can be no evangelistic call addressed to a person inviting him or her to enter a new kind of fellowship and learning, if there is not such a body of persons, again distinct from the totality of society, to whom to come and from whom to learn.[8]

In this case we are compelled to see that the church is not just the hearer of the evangelistic message, a passive vehicle that provides a pulpit from which the evangelist addresses outsiders, a group incidental to evangelistic preaching. The community of faith provides the experiences that evangelistic preaching is intended to explain, the integrity that embodies the Good News, and the distinctive community in which radical believers in Jesus are created anew.

Worship as Evangelism

If it is true that the community provides the occasion and substance of the evangelistic sermon, then it would follow that one of the church's primary tasks, to worship God, has an evangelistic dimension. Worship is "one of the primary and irreplaceable ingredients in evangelism."[9] In a community that is immersed in the praise of God, evangelism flows out of a sense of gratitude, an attitude of awe, even an experience of enjoyment. In fact, this sort of worship

> alone inspires that sense of freedom and confidence that is one of the hallmarks of authentic evangelism. Worship releases the church to relax; it makes her aware that God is the primary agent in evangelism; it breaks the temptation to manipulate for worthy ends; and it sets her free to mediate the presence of God....[10]

If we revisit Pentecost for a moment, we may recall that Peter's sermon arises in the context of worship. The Christians were praying, receiving the Spirit and, most important, declaring "God's deeds of power." It is this declaration that attracted outsiders, that raised questions for them, and that created a clear division between those who were intrigued by this sort of praise and those who saw it as drunkenness (Acts 1:12). Early Christian worship was simultaneously evangelistic. Later, after Peter and John had been released from prison, the church again engaged in communal prayer. The purpose of such prayer was to obtain from God communal courage for evangelism:

> And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30)

Paul recognizes the evangelistic dimension of worship. He addresses corporate worship in 1 Corinthians 11-14. The Corinthians, we may recall, were exercised about the hierarchy-power dynamics, if you will, of the various spiritual gifts. In response, Paul goes to the heart of the matter and reminds them that true worship, characterized by prophetic proclamation, has a distinctively evangelistic impact on visitors:

> If, therefore, the whole church comes together and...all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship God, declaring, "God is really among you [plural!]." (1 Corinthians 14:3-25)

It is not, in Paul's opinion, the word of the individual evangelist that brings conviction and conversion, but words spoken by "all" in the context of worship: an unbeliever is reproved "by all" and called to account "by all" when "all prophesy."

Many communities cannot apply Paul's words directly to their liturgical life; the centuries may have stilled the communal prophetic impetus in our churches. Still, from the perspective of Acts and 1 Corinthians, both friends and foes of evangelistic preaching – as it is typically understood in the North American context – ought to be able to find a point of agreement in the acknowledgment that true worship *can* have an evangelistic dimension. It would be unwise, then, to ignore discussions of evangelism and worship. Liturgical evangelism, in particular, is a model that values the church's rites and rituals as venues of spiritual transformation for both individuals and the gathered community. As Robert Webber explains in his book, *Celebrating Our Faith: Evangelism Through Worship,*

"external rites have the power to order an inner experience."[11] In this way, the liturgy of the worship service can be used as a vehicle for people to experience concretely the Good News of Jesus Christ. This can happen as the liturgy invites the gathered community – including unbelievers – to God's activity in and through Jesus Christ.

The conscious incorporation of the evangelistic dimension can revitalize worship for believers and bring unbelievers to faith, for, in worship, the Good News is proclaimed again and again, not merely through an isolated evangelistic sermon, but from the first note of the service to the last. Moreover, various dimensions of the Christian life, various aspects of the Good News, are accentuated throughout the liturgical year. As Henri Nouwen writes in his book, *Letters to Marc About Jesus,* participation in the church's ongoing liturgical life leads to an increasingly deep knowledge of Christ. "Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost: these seasons and feasts teach you to know Jesus better and better and unite you more and more intimately with the divine life he offers you in the church."[12]

Economics and Evangelism

The worship of God that ends in a communal plea for boldness, which Luke records in Acts 4:23-31 – led the early Christians, as earlier at Pentecost, to be filled with the Spirit and to speak "the word of God with boldness." Significant in Luke's account is how he continues:

> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (4:32-35)

We see from this summary account that the praying community did not live with an easy division of purse and prayer, of economics and spirituality, of individual piety and communal disparity.

Luke makes unavoidably clear that the power of apostolic testimony was directly related to communal integrity. He notes that "no one claimed private ownership" (4:32), then describes how "with great power the apostles gave their testimony" (4:33), then returns to the reality that "there was not a needy person among them" (4:34). This is a narrative sandwich (common possessions – powerful testimony – no needy people) that may leave a disquieting distaste in our modern mouths but shows plainly that, according to Luke, the shared bread of early Christian economics held a powerful evangelistic message.

The integral relationship between deeds of justice and words of witness has been revived in our era by such persons as Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action and author of *Rich Christians in an Age of hunger. Sider maintains that evangelism and social action are separate activities but inseparable partners.* He distinguishes between evangelism and social action by their aims. The intent of evangelism is to invite "non-Christians to embrace the Gospel of the kingdom, to believe in Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord, and join his new redeemed community." The intent of social concern is to improve "the physical, socioeconomic and political well-being of people through relief, development, and structural change."[13] Yet these are also inseparable partners, for Jesus' model of the kingdom of God binds evangelism and social action as equal partners.[14] Sider, in fact, is committed to recreating this partnership in what he calls shalom revivals – revivals that would retain the general characteristics of a Billy Graham Crusade along with a central focus on God's preference for the poor and the oppressed. The invitation would include calling people forward to commit themselves to a concrete area of social action.[15]

Typically in North America, the relationship between evangelism and acts of social justice is viewed as sequential rather than simultaneous. From this perspective, an individual ought first to be converted by an evangelistic word and subsequently trained in the ways of justice and discipleship. This view is represented in an article by Billy Graham entitled, "Conversion – A Personal Revolution," written in the late 1960s:

> I am equally convinced that the preaching of the kerygma and the call for conversion would do more to remedy the social ills of our time than anything we could possibly do. There is no doubt that the social gospel has directed its energies toward the release of many of the problems of suffering humanity. I am for it and I believe that it is Biblical! However, I am convinced that we do not have a personal gospel and a social gospel. There is one Gospel and one Gospel only, and that Gospel is the dynamic of God to change the individual and, *through the individual* society.[16]

Emilio Castro, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and a Uruguayan Methodist theologian, disagrees:

> ...it appears to me an erroneous theology which teaches...a movement of love to God first and a movement of love to neighbor after.... [In] evangelistic preaching we will call people to a vertical relationship and afterwards we will market Christian education to teach them the horizontal relationship with the neighbor.[17]

With the arguably unbiblical separation of the divine and human relationships, there remain the practical questions: *When* will the second movement of love to neighbor – social concern – be taught? And who will teach it?

Once again, the story of Pentecost lends peculiar clarity to this discussion. We saw, first, that Peter's evangelistic sermon explained the church's experience; it was occasioned by the remarkable work of God in the living community that demanded explanation. We saw, second, that the church had devoted itself to worship: persisting in communal prayer, receiving the Spirit, and proclaiming the mighty deeds of God. It was, in fact, that recitation of God's mighty deeds, rather than Peter's sermon, which attracted observers' attention. Now, third, we can cull from Luke's account of Pentecost that the evangelistic message is clearly joined at the hip with the way of radical discipleship. Luke records that, *as soon as* 3,000 were baptized, they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). There is no sequential relationship between evangelism and subsequent discipleship. In Luke's description of this earliest community, they continued with apostolic signs and wonders-healing of the oppressed and helpless; they "had all things in common" and would "distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need"; they prayed in the temple often and ate together in homes; they praised God; and, of course, as a by-product they grew in number (Acts 2:43-47). In this summary – whether Luke has idealized the situation or not is irrelevant to the point – there is not the slightest hint that a distinction exists between piety and possessions, between economics and communal euphoria, between evangelism and social justice.

Evangelism and the New Millennium

The twentieth century has known painful divisions between those who espouse evangelism and those who eschew it. We have suggested that a repositioning of emphasis on evangelism may lead to concord and shared vision between proverbial friends and foes of evangelism. We have urged that evangelistic preaching be centered in the congregation, in the distinctive community in whose worship resides evangelistic potential and whose activity on behalf of the poor and broken goes hand in glove with evangelistic preaching. All of this we have already known, of course, for two millenniums, by way of the familiar account of Pentecost, in which Peter was called on as an evangelist to interpret the vitality of the church's experience, to explain the extraordinary praise that characterized their worship, and to bring three thousand people into a community that, from the outset, seemed to have understood the symbiotic relationship between evangelistic utterance and evangelistic action.

Notes

1. This article originally appeared as "Evangelistic Preaching at the Beginning of the New Millennium"in *Journal For Preachers*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Pentecost 2000) and is used by permission.
2. An example of this is V.L. Stanfield, *Effective Evangelistic Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967). Besides a four-paragraph "Foreword" in which the author mentions that these sermons were preached in church revivals, all that is included in the book are ten evangelistic sermons. Certainly there is no interest in where or when or to whom these were preached.
3. Loscalzo's intention to recognize other factors beyond simply the act of the evangelistic sermon is evident in this quote, "Preaching never happens in a vacuum. Before we compose evangelistic sermons, we had better take stock of the world in which we live, or our efforts may never find ears to hear." Craig Loscalzo, *Evangelistic Preaching That Connects* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 13. However, due to the discrepancy noted above, he does not achieve his intention.
4. Darius Salter, *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 282. [4] Robin Williams, Jr., *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation,* 2nd. ed. (New York: Knopf, 1960), 463; reprinted in William Dymess, *How Does America Hear the Gospel?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 97.
5. Robin Williams, Jr., *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knoph, 1960), 463; reprinted in William Dyrness, *How Does America Hear the Gospel?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 97.
6. John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State,* Institute of Mennonite Studies Series No. 3 (Newton, KS.: Faith & Life, 1964), 10.
7. John Howard Yoder, "A People in the World," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical,* ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 74.
8. Ibid., 75.
9. William Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1989), 168. 9. Ibid., 169.
10. Ibid., 169.
11. Robert Webber, *Celebrating Our Faith: Evangelism Through Worship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 8.
12. Henri Nouwen, *Letters to Marc About Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 83; quoted in Kevin Holder, "Liturgical Evangelism: A Model of Evangelism Paper/Presentation," unpublished paper for classroom use, Duke Divinity School, 1997.
13. Ronald Sider, *One-Sided Christianity? Uniting the Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,1993),165.
14. See Ibid., 171-73.
15. Ibid., 194.
16. *Ecumenical Review,* Vol 19 (July 1967), 28 1.
17. Emilio Castro, *Hacia Una Pastoral Latinoamericana,* Colección "Iglesia Y Misión," No. 2 (San José: Publicaciones INDEF, 1974), 88. Translation ours.

Book Reviews

Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity

By Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr.

Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2001, 607 pp.

This book offers a substantial description of the field of apologetics. It addresses fundamental questions and shows how the various approaches support Christianity's basic claims. However, it is weak on postmodernism.

The book has six parts. Part one asks, "What is apologetics?" and provides a definition and historical summary. Parts two through five describe four approaches to apologetics: "classical," "evidential," "reformed," and "fideist." Each part follows the same structure, starting with a chapter on five representative thinkers (for instance, C.S. Lewis, Norman Geisler, Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, and Søren Kierkegaard), followed by expository chapters on major themes. The book uses a set of dialogues between two fictional nonbelievers and four apologists via each of the methods to show how each works. Each section ends with a summary of strengths and weaknesses. For one wishing a survey of the field, these parts of the book offer a good resource.

Part six claims to advance the current state of apologetics by introducing the authors' integrative approach. In a way, to advance is to retreat, because they argue that apologetics before the twentieth century tended to be more integrative (pp. 451-452) as it should be today. The authors conclude that various combinations of the four approaches make apologetics more supple and responsive to questions in the twenty-first century.

Expositions with many diagrams and charts lead readers through much information. The dialogues give the book a narrative quality and help to a degree to ground the questions in real life instead of abstractions. It is a readable book, but since it covers so much territory, some readers may need to return to previous parts of the book to understand passing references made in the latter parts. For example, in chapter 20 ("Apologists Who Favor Integration"), numerous references are made to "reformed epistemology" (pp. 482ff.). No definition appears, so one unfamiliar with the term must return to chapter 13 ("Reformed Apologetics: Christianity in Conflict," pp. 287-310) for a refresher.

The book also includes two appendices. The first has a table that shows how the four approaches relate (an aid to integration). The second provides brief descriptions of fourteen Internet sites on apologetics. An extensive annotated bibliography guides further research. This list includes many works not directly related to apologetics (for example William Bousma's biography of John Calvin). Like the book itself, the bibliography is weak on postmodernism even though one purpose of the book is to do apologetics well in the twenty-first century. Noticeably absent are recent apologists like Philip Clayton and Nancey Murphy, who take a postmodern approach. Moreover, the authors' dismiss "postmodernism" as self-refuting, relativistic and irrational (pp. 93, 513). In one

way this conclusion is understandable since postmodern thought is sometimes understood to make traditional apologetics a waste of time. These authors can be forgiven for defending their intellectual territory, not to mention their ministries. One wishes nonetheless for some acknowledgment of the range of postmodern thought (for example Stanley Grenz' oft-noted and quoted work, *A Primer on Postmodernism*) and the value it has for evangelism-minded Christians.

The book is thus rather lopsided: it does a fine job dealing with questions related to apologetics from a modernist perspective and it has good value in this respect. It does not see postmodern thought as any way helpful to the task. One's own views about the boundaries of modernism/postmodernism will decide if and to what extent this book is useful.

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Practicing Gospel – Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry

By Edward Farley

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, 189 pp.

> Why read these essays? They are challenging texts. Some are technical, and all are written in an austere style that does not cushion the clear description of limits, problems, and tragic conditions that they contain. They are also unconventional. No one will discover here quite what he or she expects. . . . Ministers and those who teach ministry practice may be jarred by the way these topics, which have so often been the focus of step-by-step instruction or easy giving theorizing, are treated here: with unrelenting theological rigor.

Thus, Barbara G. Wheeler begins the Foreword of this book.

Here is a book for graduate classes, for pastors who are interested in theological as well as practical aspects of ministry. It is not a book to be used as an evangelism text but can be well used to challenge and shake up those of us who have not taken the spreading of the gospel into twenty-first century methods and modes.

Edward Farley has been teaching and writing from his position at the Divinity School of Vanderbilt University for many years. From his vantage point, he has afflicted the comfortable among us over and over again. The cover summary tells us that "by holding theology and practice in an inescapable partnership, Farley rightly refocuses the church's life on its proper object and subject: a mysterious, transforming God."

The subtitle of the book, "Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry," gives us immediate insight about what to expect as we read these

pages. If you are looking for a book that will reconfirm your long-held beliefs and practices, this is not the book for you. If, on the other hand, you would welcome some unconventional thoughts on practical theology, homiletics and worship, and Christian education and pastoral care – then read on! This is your kind of book!

The 13 essays Farley divides into three parts: Practical Theology; Homiletics and Worship; and Christian Education and Pastoral Care. The divisions are apt, and one mines treasure in every chapter. His discussion of "Theology in the Life of the Congregation" makes hardy fodder for every pastor. "Toward a Practical Theology of Popular Religion" digs into the depths of theology from which many of us shy away.

As Farley writes on homiletics and worship, he draws on his own long experience as a preacher and worship planner/leader. Then he moves to talk about "a Practical Theology of Preaching."

The five chapters of Christian Education and Pastoral Care should be read carefully, for, as Farley points out, many pastors today know – or care – little for church education. He goes to great lengths to describe the demise of main line churches in general and church education in particular.

This will not be an easy read, nor a fun book. It will be a challenging read, a book that will make you think. And isn't that what Ed Farley has been doing for these many years?

J. David Hester is President Emeritus at Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, TN.

Jesus' Divine Ministry

By Ajith Fernando

Wheaton, Il: Crossway Books, 2002, 255 pp.

Anything from the pen of Ajith Fernando commands attention, for when it comes to believing biblical scholarship with practical application, he has few peers.

In this latest book, Fernando examines key leadership qualities in the life and work of our Lord. Using the description in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel as an outline, he observes principles in the way Christ ministered, which are then taken as guidelines for His disciples to follow. Not every trait in a life so perfect can be covered of course. But those he does identify are exegeted well (like servanthood, accepting people, team building, mind saturation with Scripture, prayer, suffering, obedience to the call of God, accountability, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit). These and other characteristics of an authentic Christian lifestyle are brought beautifully into focus.

What makes the account convincing is the author's transparent sincerity. Without fanfare or glossing over his own struggles, he simply tells it like it is. Adding credibility, Dr. Fernando writes out of a wide and varied

ministry experience. For many years, he has directed the Youth for Christ movement in his homeland of Sri Lanka. He also assists in the leadership of a local church, supervises a drug rehab program, serves on the translation committee of a new Sinhala Bible, often represents evangelicals before government officials, and still finds time to teach and preach around the world. Yet, most importantly, amid an incredibly busy schedule, he keeps central the priority of leading his family in the way of Jesus.

I can learn much from such a man. And I want my students to absorb his message, too. That is why this work is required reading in my classes on the evangelism of Jesus and his disciples. It would compliment any course that relates to spiritual formation. Reading this book can be taken as a tonic to our soul.

Dr. Robert E. Coleman is Distinguished Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.

"But Don't All Religions Lead to God?": Navigating the Multi-Faith Maze

By Michael Green

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002, 92 pp.

Michael Green has written this book to help believers and nonbelievers alike to "navigate the multi-faith maze." In response to a society faced with questions like, "Aren't All Religions Much the Same?" and "But Surely All Religions Lead to God?" Green offers a short apologetic with a clear call to Jesus Christ. Green writes mainly to unbelievers to lessen some of the confusion surrounding Christianity and point toward the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

The first four of the book's 10 chapters answer four frequently asked questions of nonbelievers about Christianity. Chapters five to eight center on "four things that make Jesus stand out, not only as special but utterly unique" (p. 34). Green argues that Christianity is not special, but Jesus *is*. Therefore, the four chapters that center on Christ expand the theme that "No Other Great Teacher . . ." (1) "Even Claimed to Bring God to Us," (2) "Dealt Radically with Human Wickedness," (3) "Broke the Final Barrier – Death," and (4) "Offers to Live within His Followers." The final chapters try to answer some hard questions about Christianity and introduce people to Christ.

Green's book is a good evangelism tool that could be used by any Christian to introduce friends to Christ or stimulate conversations with those wrestling with "multi-faith political correctness." It is easy to read and clearly Christ-centered. The final two chapters brought some uneasiness though. For one thing, I do not share Green's enthusiasm for the Alpha course (p.91). However, I was most disappointed with chapter nine ("Let's Face Some Hard Questions"). I think Green's attempt to answer the question, "But what is the situation of people who do not respond to the gospel?" (p. 79) is lacking. Before

explaining three views he believes are "inadequate" to answer the question, Green warns Christians not to judge (quoting Matthew 7:1). Of course, Jesus did not "expressly" forbid judging; in the next sentence (cf. 7:2). Green then encourages Christians to "reject the idea of conscious unending torment as firmly as they reject universalism" (p. 80). He refers to Mark 9:48 as a "metaphor from the city rubbish dump where there were always worms among the offal and where the fire was always smoldering" – "a picture of final destruction, not conscious unending torment" (p.80). Does the metaphor in 9:48 represent final destruction, as Green suggests, and not unending torment? The other passage Green uses to bolster his argument is Revelation 19:20, speaking of the lake of fire, which in his view is "not prepared for people but for all principles of evil, which will be annihilated" (p. 80). In contrast to Green's perspective on Mark 9:48 is verse 43: "to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire." Two other passages that argue for "unending torment" include Matthew 13:42, "the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" and Isaiah 33:14, "Who among us can live with continual burning?"

Green's answer to the "situation of people who do not respond to the gospel" becomes, "And those who do not respond to the gospel miss this glorious relationship with God, the very thing they were made for. Sadly, they "miss it forever" (p. 80). In other words, they just miss out.

This book is practical, aimed at the lay level. Believers might find its contents useful as a discussion starter with unbelievers.

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The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards

Edited by D.G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, Stephen J. Nichols

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003, 255 pp.

It is evident that "the contemporary fascination with Jonathan Edwards shows little sign of abatement." It is apparent to me that many are looking for a response to a world that is increasingly oblivious to evil and is vulnerable to sin. Although I am a thoroughgoing Wesleyan (should I mention that Jonathan Edwards' father's mother's maiden name was Tuttle) I welcome those who see in Edwards a relevant response to young and old alike. I do not normally appreciate edited books, but I found this work most helpful and informative. It is erudite, sophisticated, theologically astute, and – for the most part – entirely readable.

There is an interesting choice of topics matching the strengths of the contributors who combine to present Edwards in his various roles: philosopher, theologian, apologist, revivalist, preacher, missionary, and college president. Here we find a wholly sympathetic portrayal of Edwards at his best. Although others define Edwards as brilliant but neurotic, here his character emerges –

even in opposition – as nothing less than heroic.

Since the contributors are from the Reformed tradition, it should come as no surprise that the most basic common denominator from one article to the next is an emphasis on Edwards' focus on God's glory and excellency and the response to God of enjoying him as one's "sweetest and highest good." Whether in reference to his tri-world vision – heaven, earth, and hell – or as a missionary to the Mohicans of Stockbridge, Edwards emerges as a man of passion under remarkable control.

Obviously written with the seminary student in mind, I would also recommend this as a helpful guide for the serious clergy and layperson.

Robert G. Tuttle, Jr. is E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary, Florida Campus, Orlando, FL.

Addicted to Hurry: Spiritual Strategies for Slowing Down

By Kirk Byron Jones

Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003, 119 pp.

This is a good book—simple, clear, direct. Jones teaches social ethics and pastoral ministry at Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts. His thesis has two parts. First, he demonstrates that chronic speed is "diminishing our lives relationally, emotionally, and spiritually." Second, he suggests an alternative way of living that will help people to stop rushing and to start savoring life more. This theme should be especially important for those engaged in the ministry of evangelism.

Jones believes that hurry is more than the product of a busy life. It is a sickness, an addiction. He makes the case that hurry and busyness do violence to us in many ways – in our relationship with people, with our family, with creation, and most important, with God. He quotes Thomas Merton, modern mystic: "There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence … [and that is] activism and overwork."

Most of us make light of our busyness, offering excuses for our schedule or telling ourselves that things will slow down after we complete this project, or that ministry. We think that hurry is unavoidable, simply a by-product of twenty-first century living. A friend of mine once said that busyness is the only addiction the church supports. In North American culture, we equate busyness with importance. The busier you are, the more important you must be.

However, in the bustle of our lives, we sacrifice a great deal – our health, our relationships, and worst of all, our communion with our Heavenly Father. Jones puts it this way: "You cannot rush and relish at the same time." It is impossible to grow deeper with God if one doesn't take time to be in God's presence with nothing else to do.

In this addiction to hurry, Jones suggests that we are running away – from our aches and fears, from ourselves, and from God. More than diagnosing

our difficulty, Jones offers a corrective, what he calls the "savoring pace alternative." Drawing examples from the life of Jesus and other biblical figures, Jones instructs us in the methods of reflecting, of taking time to listen, to be quiet, to reflect, to wait. He chooses the phrase "savoring pace" intentionally; he finds that a positive way of approaching our addiction is more useful than exhortations to simply *slow down!*

In describing the savoring pace lifestyle, Jones devotes three of his ten chapters to helping his readers understand how by living more intentionally they can see more clearly, listen more carefully and think more deeply. He ends with practical instructions for beginning each day with what he calls a "savoring pace lifelines." These are even available on his website, posted fresh every Monday.

What does this book have to do with evangelism? Perhaps not much, in one way. It doesn't describe a technique or give a theological background. In other ways, however, it offers a great deal, to the evangelist him or herself. Many who share their faith regularly are driven by a passion – a passion for lost people, a passion to redeem the time, a passion to touch people before it is too late. While the passion is commendable, the danger of over-extending our schedules must be noted. If Jesus found the need to draw aside regularly to be quiet and to listen, dare we do any less?

This book is simply written. I read it in about two hours at one sitting. It would be suitable for anyone in the local church, but especially for those in church leadership. In addition, each chapter closes with a list of questions that would be suitable for personal reflection or group discussion.

I heartily recommend this book.

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Teaching Cross-Culturally

By Judith E. Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003, 134 pp.

Here is a book that clarifies and values the distinctives that we encounter in cross-cultural settings. It highlights the issues that bring conflict. It points to biblical principles. It guides the reader into developing strategies that facilitate learning.

Since I have written a book on cross-cultural evangelism (*Can We Talk*, Abingdon, '99), I was most interested in the topic of teaching cross-culturally. Few westerners think globally. Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter point out that because of our provincialism many westerners have a method of teaching that has a "hidden curriculum"-- a "cultural agenda."

Since both authors have doctorates in fields related to the topic and have had much experience teaching in cross-cultural settings, my expectations were high. I was not disappointed. The comments of an *Asian* reviewer on the back cover, "After reading this book, I need to do a U-turn!" reminded me that

all teachers need to be aware of their own culture, the host culture, and – if teaching the Bible – the biblical culture.

Jesus was the master of "show and tell." He did ministry so effectively that his disciples kept asking, "Show us how to do ministry like that." Westerners do far too much telling and not nearly enough showing.

I was struck with the importance of story. We read much of late about the narrative approach. I found it helpful to realize that in many cultures, oral tradition is more trusted than written tradition since oral tradition communicates a *collective* truth. Written story too often gives us only one person's point of view.

I found helpful the examples of apt (and inappropriate) questions to ask in a host culture. For example, "How did you learn as a child?"

Since reading the book I am even more inclined to listen well and pay close attention. The importance of being a 150% person – "75% birth culture and 75% incarnate in the culture of ministry" – is a basic principle that we need to embrace. I recommend this book for pastors, seminary students, and missionaries (long-term *and* short-term) as well.

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Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity

Edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss Helseth.
Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003, 416 pp.

The authors of the book under review argue against a group of present-day theologians called open theists. The essayists dismiss open theists as "incoherent" and "utterly vacuous" (Paul Kjoss Helseth, pp. 292, 300), "false teachers" (Wayne Grudem, p. 356) or wrong, injurious and proponents of a "marginal novelty" (John Piper, p. 370). In the face of combative writers who vigorously attack the open theists, I am reminded of a comment made by Scottish poet Edwin Muir (1887-1959) that he would rather face an entire army than one lone Calvinist convinced that she or he knew the will of God.

Seeking to understand such strong reaction, I also read *The Openness of God*. This 1994 title of a collection of essays by Pinnock, Sanders and others has prompted the rejoinder of Piper and others.

On both sides of the debate, the controversialists marshal scripture to support their claims. In broad strokes, they argue as follows: according to open theists, God in grace grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God's will for their lives. Against this position, the authors of *Beyond the Bounds* argue that open theists undermine biblical Christianity by offering a sub-Christian view of God. They lift up words of C. S. Lewis who

wrote, "Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are going to do tomorrow" (*Mere Christianity,* 1952, p. 148).

In a sense, the authors replay classic positions of Calvinists and Arminians. They deal with a perennial question in Christian theology: given that we sin inevitably, why believe in a God who predetermines that some are punished for what they have no power not to do? In less classic terms, how do we participate with God to bring the future into being? Or, in more contemporary terms, why believe in a God who seems indifferent to human suffering?

I received a review copy of *Beyond the Bounds* by accident and accepted the assignment of reviewing it. As a colleague of Dr. Pinnock for almost two decades, I wanted to read his current writing as well as the riposte. Should a missiologist be concerned with this debate? I think so. In present-day North American life, the questions of what God can and cannot do, or may and may not do are not hot topics. Nonetheless, people experience suffering as real and possibly as an obstacle to coming to faith. Paul's bold declaration of joy in suffering (Romans 5:2-5) is offensive to many and runs against the grain of some popular Christianity and the new age spiritualities. Concerned with evangelism, I share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a culture of denial, of God, of human sin and refusal to accept responsibility to live into God's dream for humanity. Yet I believe the good news of Jesus Christ entails the *theologia crucis*, the way of the cross. Strange as it may seem to modern ears, God enters into solidarity with the suffering world. On both sides of the open theism debate, the combatants agree that God is with us amidst the pain of human existence.

The mission of the church and the evangelism by which we live out our life in Christ arise from the dynamic relation between God and the world. The book under review and other literature generated by fresh writing on doctrines such as God's immutability, impassibility and foreknowledge will give guidance to Christians in this arena of controversy.

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Occupy until I Come: A.T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World

By Dana L. Robert

Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B.Eerdmans, 2003, 322 pp.

While the name A.T. Pierson is recognized among evangelical scholars and theological students, the story of his life and contribution to the missionary movement of the late 1800s is often unknown and uncelebrated. Dana Robert's biography of Arthur Tappan Pierson thus fills a void.

As with all well-written biographies, the author gives details of Pierson's life within the historical context – the context that formed the backdrop of evangelical missions today. The book follows the journey of Pierson's spiritual formation and theological development, which takes some interesting turns. It also follows his journey from denominationalism to evangelical ecumenism, with other leading evangelicals such as D.L. Moody, C.H. Spurgeon, and A.J. Gordon.

A.T. Pierson began as a "New-School" Presbyterian pastor with a heart for the urban poor. His heart for missions expanded however, and soon he became the leading missiologist in the surging foreign missions movement in the late 1800s. He helped to launch the Student Volunteer Movement, as well as advised several mission societies to cooperate in "the evangelization of the world in this generation"-- a phrase which became a watchword of the movement. During his career Pierson penned more than fifty books on missions, theology, and the Christian life. He also served as editor of the leading evangelical periodical on missions, *The Missionary Review*. Further, he was one of seven original editors of the Scofield Reference Bible.

The metamorphosis in Pierson's eschatology from postmillennial to premillennial is critical to understand his zeal for world missions, as well as his affinity with other evangelical leaders of the day such as George Müller and D.W. Whittle, reflecting the dispensational theology of Northfield conferences and the higher spiritual life teaching of Keswick conferences. With a deep conviction about Christ's imminent return, and an optimism of the Great Commission being fulfilled, Pierson labored to mobilize both men and women for the mission field.

In the latter part of his career, Pierson also carried on a preaching ministry in America, England and Scotland. During the illness and following the death of C.H. Spurgeon, Pierson filled the pulpit at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. He became a sought-after preacher and respected Bible teacher.

Dana Robert effectively draws lessons from Pierson's life, including his *mistakes.* For example, early in his career as a pastor, Pierson failed to gain the trust of his congregation before making changes. He also failed to know a congregation well before judging them. Dana Robert writes, "If he had only been more patient, and tried to lead people instead of driving them, he would have been more successful in his plans."

On the positive side, Dana Robert points out Pierson's keen insight into mission theory, seeker-friendly worship, core values of the local church, and a strategy for church growth a century before Church Growth theory was formalized by Donald McGavran. The author also addresses Pierson's work as an apologist who challenged Ingersoll's skepticism, Darwin's theory of evolution, and German higher criticism – all relevant topics for the student apologist.

The book reflects Robert's previous research on Pierson in her dissertation at Yale. It is presented here, however, for a general readership,

without footnotes or critical endnotes, making it well suited for lay readers, evangelism students, church history majors, and missionary candidates.

In covering Pierson's life, Dana Robert has given us the best biography of this leading evangelical advocate of foreign missions in the late 1800s. Further, she has presented his life in a readable and interesting format against the backdrop of transatlantic evangelicalism of the period.

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Habits of the High-Tech Heart, Living Virtuously in the Information Age

By Quentin J. Schultz.

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002, 256 pages.

Quentin Schultz wants to help people make moral responses within what Schultz calls the "technologizing of everyday life." He is concerned that every technological advance also delivers us to new moral quandaries and, further, that "if we do not address such moral dilemmas, we will lose our capacity to act responsibly." In chapter one, he accurately critiques what some call the "religion of technology," which they believe will provide humans with greater freedom, more power, and everlasting peace. He shows that the current "Informationism can derail any quest for moral wisdom by emphasizing the *is* over the *ought*, and *measurement* over *meaning*." In chapter two, Schultz argues that unlimited bandwidth will not equip people with moral bearings and that moral decisions are ultimately more important. Chapter three reminds believers that moral wisdom helps us act rightly, with prudence and good judgment, rather than merely behaving efficiently and effectively. Chapter four discusses the need for humility to prevent the foolishness of putting too much hope in the power of technique in order to solve almost every human problem. Chapter five calls for authenticity in cyber communication that depends on truthfulness, empathy and integrity. Chapter six argues that cyber-culture needs to have shared moral concerns, not just technical expertise or celebrity status. Chapter seven argues that human beings need *organic* community life instead of disembodied "demographic colonies." The closing chapter summarizes his positions and suggestions that people with high tech hearts are neither moralists nor pragmatists. He believes people can detechnologize our religious traditions and renew virtue-nurturing practices.

The greatest contribution of this text is to examine our infatuation with technological solutions that cannot meet humankind's deepest needs or desires.

A notebook computer sits on the lap of this reviewer. The palm pilot chimes with a reminder of today's deadline, and (after an interruption from the cell phone); wireless e-mail will send it to the editor. Technology has indeed become pervasive in the lives of believers and unbelievers. As with any toy or tool, each person must limit the things that compete with our allegiance to Jesus Christ. Schulz's premise and conclusions are sound. He is not trying to become a modern Luddite. He does help remind us that the secular culture continues to try to remove any influence of morality and spirituality from the public arena. Believers need to use the information superhighway as another tool to present the uncompromised gospel to every person on earth.

Habits of a High Tech Heart provides thoughtful contribution to contemporary ethics. It is well written, thoroughly documented, and filled with interesting anecdotes. It is not an evangelical text and includes a limited use of scripture. It is theistic but Jesus is only mentioned briefly in the last chapter. It is helpful to have writers calling for moral virtues that come from a supracultural standard of right and wrong. I would have preferred the text to present that supracultural standard as coming solely from the Creator God, through His Son Jesus and in the power of His Holy Spirit. The book is not intended to aid the reader with online (or offline) evangelism. The references to religion and church are generic. So the book has limited congregational or seminary use. It would be helpful with an academic audience studying ethics and technology.

C. Thomas Wright is Chief Operating Officer and missionary for Accessjesus.org, an online ministry to share Jesus, train believers, and provide web development and design.

Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of Christ's Body

By Howard A. Snyder with Daniel V. Runyon

Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002. 208 pp.

"This is a book about the DNA of Christ's body" (p. 13). With that opening statement, the authors of *Decoding the Message* ask a fundamental question about the nature and mission of the church in today's world: What makes the church a healthy organism? (p. 65). What is vital for the church to carry out its mission in a global and complex world?

Howard Snyder and Daniel Runyon have written a book that looks at the health and vitality of the church through the lens of organic metaphors and images. They show how a genetic metaphor, rooted in God's creation, can be useful for reflecting on the nature of the church – how, by doing so, the church can move toward a healthier view of mission and ministry (p. 14). Thus, the whole book is an attempt to explain the essential DNA of the church.

Snyder and Runyon start by arguing for a broader perspective than the Nicene formula of one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church (p. 20). The "DNA of the "Christ-body" also includes the biblical traits of diversity, charisma,

locality, and prophecy (p. 22). Without those, the health of the church remains incomplete, and the basic dynamism of the gospel is lost. This is important. The basic features of the gospel message must include these genetic markers; otherwise, the church is lost.

Moreover, the church, as a sign of its faithfulness, must preach the gospel to the poor. Without the mission of the church to the oppressed of society, the gospel remains empty. This is a key test of the church's apostolic mission: not only do we *confess* Christ as Lord and Savior but we also *identify* with those for whom Christ died – the poor and the marginalized (p. 28). A true, biblical ecclesiology must continue Christ's ministry by taking the gospel to the poor.

Throughout the work, the authors explore the complexity of the church as an organism. From mission outreach to church structures, from public worship to public discipleship, they emphasize what makes the church genetically vital. Near the end, the authors focus on the challenges of holistic mission as it relates to globalization and the environment. For the church to remain vibrant, they say, the gospel must remain coherently grounded in, and compatible with, the mission of Jesus Christ (p. 127). In this sense, Christian discipleship and evangelism are not separate entities but are essential to the basic DNA make-up and earth-keeping responsibilities of the missional church in the twenty-first century.

Decoding the Message is a good exercise in practical theology, providing useful tips in helping people understand basic issues related to the scope of ecclesiology on a new global mission field. The authors make use of the fictional Heartland Evangelical Church as a springboard to explore the way the DNA of the gospel gets passed on through the practices of a local congregation. The reader is able to take a journey not only through the genetic make-up of the church but also through the practical implications of that make-up in a local setting. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter can assist small groups through the material as they search for creative ways to bridge the growing gap between church membership and discipleship (p. 65).

Several points are worth highlighting. First, the book has a healthy bent toward a renewed Wesleyan sense of mission to and with the poor. Second, there is a clear focus on both the Trinitarian and Incarnational nature of the church's mission. And third, there is a helpful critique of mega-church and church growth mind-sets as dominant motifs for understanding the church's mission. Renewal is not simply about numerical growth but about recapturing the essential DNA of the gospel.

This book can be helpful to both clergy and laity. It could be used as part of a course of study or seminary class on evangelism and mission. The chapters on globalization are useful too. No mention is made of global terrorism though. One wonders how healthy churches will engage a world in which global terrorism and global markets are everyday realities. How will the people of Heartland Evangelical Church deal with these growing realities?

Such questions aside, Snyder and Runyon have a helpful book to share

with people who understand the importance of understanding the church's true DNA in today's complex and interrelated world.

Andrew D. Kinsey (D. Min.) is the senior pastor of Community United Methodist Church in Vincennes, Indiana.

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