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In This Issue

Among the major goals of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education are the careful definition of evangelism as an area of scholarship and understanding of how it should be taught in graduate and undergraduate degree programs. In our first article, William Abraham provides insight into both of these questions. He argues that evangelism is a "field-encompassing field," that necessarily draws on a range of disciplines; at the same time, the study of evangelism serves as a lens that enables us to see such traditional subjects as church history and systematic theology in an entirely new light. Given the nature of evangelism as a field, its teaching must be understood as education rather than training. The goal is not simply to impart a set of skills but to develop a certain kind of person; it is also to so understand evangelism in relation to such concepts as mission, church, and salvation as to enable the evaluation of its practice. Because the teaching of evangelism is formational, it cannot be done without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This in turn leads Abraham to raise the provocative question of whether Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit now pose a crisis for the scholarly academy itself.

The remaining articles all focus on the practice of evangelism in a postmodern culture. David Fitch argues that the cultural shift away from a belief in scientific objectivity and objective truth undercuts the effectiveness of evidentialist apologetics and seeker services. Truth must now be displayed not through convincing arguments but in living communities. It is through participation in such communities that postmoderns experience the gospel. Fitch describes a rich array of practices that mark these communities, including hospitality, fellowship groups, formation and nurture, embodied worship, and baptismal initiation.

Kimberly Thacker addresses this same issue through an emphasis on the postmodern value of authenticity. Postmoderns value lives and communities that are consistent with their chosen beliefs. Mixed with their desire for self-expression is a hunger for honest relationships and an authentic connection with the divine. Thacker argues that we should help postmoderns understand that authentic personhood, community, and relationship with God is not possible apart from a commitment to Jesus Christ. This claim is convincing when our own lives and communities reflect these truths.

How then might we go about helping postmoderns understand the foundational claims of Christianity? Noting that we are in a post-Christendom context, Andrew Kinsey insists that evangelism is incomplete without catechesis. He evaluates two innovative models of

Christian teaching: Christian Believer, which grounds Christians in the classical doctrines of the church, and *The Alpha Course*, designed to introduce seekers to Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. Kinsey provides an insightful comparison and evaluation of these two very different approaches, and calls for a recovery of the art of pastoral teaching as essential to the ministry of evangelism.

Finally, in a sermon delivered at the last meeting of the Academy Donna Hailson challenges us to boldly engage this post-modern culture. She describes some striking ways people either deny or make a joke about the reality of sin. Yet the problem is real, and can only be effectively addressed through faith in Jesus Christ. She shows how a wide variety of media–drama, movies, books, music, and especially the internet–is being used to build bridges between the gospel and popular culture. Through engaging culture we can make the gospel understandable and demonstrate its relevance without compromising its timeless truths and salvific power.

This year we conclude with eighteen book reviews. From sin to conversion, the altar call to eMinistry, urban ministry to church renewal, these books constitute a wealth of resources for both classroom and church. They are a sign of the continuing vitality of evangelistic scholarship and ministry.

Henry H. Knight III

Editorial: Learning From Students

Like a lot of academics, I love scholarly books. I am excited by informative research, perceptive analysis, and creative thinking. I also like writing. To develop your thoughts on paper (or for many today, on screen) is itself a learning experience; to potentially communicate those things you believe important to others by way of the printed page is a great privilege.

Yet academia is its own subculture, and is distinctively different from the world of most Christians. They tend to read more popularly written books. They are increasingly oriented to the internet for information. They gravitate to visual images, striking stories, and wisdom condensed into memorable sayings or short lists of principles. Most of us who teach have been decisively shaped by academia; most of our students by popular culture. This means we need to attend carefully to how we teach evangelism to our students. Just as we remind them to be aware of context in their practice of evangelism, we need to remember the context from which our students come. Just because they are in an "academic institution" does not mean they have abandoned their native ways of learning and thinking.

On one hand, when we assign the scholarly books and thematic essays, we find that for many students this is a counter-cultural activity. If we believe that understanding an extended argument, analyzing concepts, critical reflection, and developing one's own ideas are important, we will need to help many of our students develop those skills. This, I suspect, is old news to those who teach, but because we have been shaped by academia we may from time to time forget that most of our students have not.

On the other hand we also need to find ways to connect with our students. Many teachers are far more creative than I am in this regard. Fortunately my students let me know what has engaged their interest and enabled them to learn. They have taught me a great deal about how to teach evangelism.

Let me share three examples. Last fall, my class on the history of evangelism in the United States read Doug Strong's *They Walked in the Spirit*, which tells the story of eight Christians who in very different ways combined vital piety, evangelism, and a passion for social justice. One could of course use theological concepts to show why these should be interrelated. But to see that inter-relationship in actual lives proved far more illuminating to the students. It was the particularity of the stories that engaged them; it was their diversity that gave richness and depth to the students' reflections.

Toward the end of spring semester I invited three practitioners of evangelism to speak to my class on evangelism through the local church. One came from a large in-town church trying to become more outwardly focused, the second led a multicultural church in the inner city with few financial resources but a rich array of ministries, and they third was from a dynamic and growing suburban megachurch. The students had already read and discussed the assigned texts, heard the lectures, and therefore were ready to ask probing questions about these ministries. At the same time, they resonated strongly with the concrete, practical accounts of persons actually engaged in evangelism. The particularity of the various contexts, linked to interaction with thoughtful practitioners, provided the occasion for engaged learning.

In that same class we tried something new (although it was a common approach in classes taught by Derrel Watkins, who shared the idea with me). The class was divided into four teams, with each assigned to research a different style of worship and its relation to evangelism. They entered into the research and collaboration with enthusiasm, and produced insightful and creative class presentations. According to their testimony, the process of working together as well as interacting with the presentations of the other teams was a significant learning experience. They became a genuine learning community, in which reading, thinking, sharing, discussion, planning, communication, and a host of other skills were organically related in a single educational experience.

I remain convinced of the value of acquiring a capacity for conceptual thinking, following an extended argument, and developing a thesis. I also remain grateful for popular communicators who distill principles of ministry out of their own experience. But I have come to realize that some of the best education occurs when students begin with specific lives, contexts, or issues, have the opportunity to interact with one another or with practitioners, and can work together in collaborative research and thinking. They learn to integrate theory and practice, as well as faithfulness to the gospel and sensitivity to context. They also demonstrate an ability for creativity and critical reflection where it really counts, in the analysis, planning, and evaluation of evangelistic ministry.

Henry H. Knight III

Teaching Evangelism

William J. Abraham

The field of evangelism has come a long way in a very short time. My own experience in the teaching of evangelism has given me much food for thought. In this paper I would like to try and summarize the fruits of that thinking in terms of how we might best conceive of our scholarly work together and how we might teach the field. These two issues are intimately linked, so I shall let them bleed into one another without apology. I shall argue in and around these issues a number of theses. First, I shall propose that evangelism belongs in the academy by its own right; second, I shall suggest that, on the way to a positive vision of teaching, we need to cast a critical eye on current ideas about teaching that are gaining ground in the academy as a whole; and third, I shall argue that we should not be surprised when we discover that letting evangelism into the academy will have its own reciprocal or dialectical effect on other fields, on our conception of teaching, and even on the life of the academy as a whole. It is my hope that we shall resist efforts to house train evangelism; rather, having been let into the academy, if only initially on sufferance, we need to explore what difference the study and practice of evangelism might make to everything we do within the academy.

When I took up the subject as a serious interest in 1985, my academic friends were noticeably nervous. They were not at all sure that this was a field worthy of scholarly attention. I can still vividly remember the embarrassment that this caused in some quarters. In the initiation rites here at SMU for new faculty, many new colleagues in the same process did not know what to do when I said that I was appointed to teach evangelism. One looked alarmed and blurted out the equivalent of "Please do not touch me! I am a liberal Anglo-Catholic!" On another occasion, at a meeting of endowed professors, I can still recall the effort by a distinguished colleague to reassure other distinguished colleagues that Perkins had not gone and lost its intellectual virginity in hiring me; he enthusiastically pointed out that I was also teaching philosophy and that I had a doctorate in the philosophy of religion from The University of Oxford. In time I

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began to enjoy watching folk deal with their embarrassment; it is a sign of progress that new professors in evangelism are less likely to have to deal with this kind of reaction.

It is not difficult to see why there should be such a change in orientation and disposition. When I came to Perkins my own denomination, The United Methodist Church, was just beginning to come to terms with the fact of massive decline, a process that stretched back to the sixties after a period of illusory optimism in the post-war years. It was clear to everyone in the know that evangelism, evangelization, church growth, the making of new disciples, and the like must, sooner or later, be given the serious attention that they deserve. We can surely applaud the speed with which the field has been embraced. The problem now is not that of securing the legitimacy of the discipline; rather, the problem is the great difficulty of finding enough people to teach at the highest level needed.

I speak rather confidently here of a "field" or "discipline." To many outside evangelism this will appear as provocative and maybe questionable. The misgivings are understandable; so let me begin by walking around the contours of this claim.

Evangelism fits in a host of niches within the academy. First, evangelism can naturally belong within the wider field of missiology. The prevailing consensus is that evangelism is one of a network of tasks that the church is appointed by God to do. In this arena, the wider horizon is, then, the exploration of theories and practices related to missiology.

Second, evangelism belongs as a crucial topic within systematic theology. Here the wider arena is the topic of ecclesiology. To be sure, this topic represents an enormous challenge, a challenge that is highlighted afresh with the collapse of ecumenism as we have know it over the last half-century. Speaking personally, I find ecclesiology to be one of the biggest headaches I face in my own work in the field of systematic theology. Moreover, it is all too true that systematic theologians working within ecclesiology rarely engage the topic of evangelism with the thoroughness it deserves. However, evangelism is a non-negotiable topic within the wider locus of ecclesiology. Any treatment of the nature and mission of the church that ignores it is simply wide of the mark.

Third, evangelism belongs naturally in the field of practical theology. Here it sits cheek by jowl with homiletics, pastoral care, the social ministries of the church, music ministries, Christian education, church administration, liturgics, and the like. There is, of course, continued debate and discussion as to how far practical theology involves the cultivation and imparting of specific skills in the practice of ministry. We trespass immediately on the distinction between training and education, a topic I shall pursue shortly.

Permit at this stage three simple points on which I think there is remarkable agreement. First, practical theology can indeed involve the gaining of specific skills in ministry. Thus homiletics involves developing the actual ability to preach; it would be pretty unthinkable for one to take a course in homiletics without developing and probably delivering appropriate sermons. Second, practical theology in every domain will involve the cultivation of critical reflection, scholarship, and the aptitude to make good judgments about fitting practice in ministry. Indeed rigorous reflection on practice is pivotal in practical theology. Thirdly, this means that the idea that practical theology involves practice, whereas all other classical areas of theological studies involve theory, collapses immediately. The practice of ministry necessarily involves theoretical assumptions that cry out for analysis and investigation. Equally, analysis and critical investigation in the traditional disciplines outside of practical theology involve the training in certain practices. Thus they involve the training in reading texts, in following the validity and soundness of arguments, in ferreting out unseen assumptions, and the like. Hence the steam has gone out of the hackneyed distinction between theory and practice. Overall, it is surely a great gain that we now have considerable consensus in and around these claims.

Fourth, and here I come to my own favored position, evangelism constitutes a field in its own right that can stand on its own feet with integrity and without apology. The technical way to express this is to say that evangelism is a field-encompassing field.[1] Here it stands with fields like geography, history, economics, and education. The marks of a field-encompassing field are two. First, we designate a particular area of study, learning, and teaching, say, education, the past, or in the relevant case, simply evangelism. Second, we then bring to bear on this area the methodological and intellectual resources of other discrete disciplines and fields; we deploy a wide variety of data and warrants in the justifying, defending, refining, and rejecting of our proposals in the theory and practice of evangelism. Both of these moves, that is, both the designation of an area and the deployment of intellectual resources, involve critical choices that cannot be shirked.

Our first critical choice is how we will conceive of evangelism. Here we are drawn into conceptual decisions about the contours of evangelism, for, clearly, how we designate the area will determine what fields we shall pursue in coming to terms with the subject of evangelism. Thus we shall have to decide whether to think of evangelism in terms of proclamation, church growth, making disciples, Christian initiation, and the like. Our disagreements about definitions are a virtue rather than a vice at this point.[2] As with most subjects, the debate about definitions provides initial

orientation and sets the table for serious conceptual decisions about how best to think of evangelism in our contemporary situation. It takes us into a wider background of theological proposals and exposes us to a host of exemplars who compete with one another as appropriate practitioners of the ministry of evangelism. In the end we have to come clean on our own conceptions of evangelism, but this decision, while it may begin by the prosaic investigation of various definitions, requires the most careful, rigorous, and self-critical scrutiny we can muster. In a way it belongs as much to the conclusion of our work as it does at the beginning.

This takes us immediately to a second choice, the choice of what ancillary disciplines, what battery of data and warrants, to bring to bear on our work as a whole. Here I have reached a very simple conclusion: given the rich discussion that has already developed about the nature of evangelism, we should draw on every relevant discipline that will help us get a better handle on our quarry. Expressing the same point from a different angle, we should put on the table every serious conception of evangelism already in place and then ransack any and every discipline that provides pertinent information and reflection related to those conceptions.[3] This makes, of course, for a very wide network of potential disciplines. In addition to the classical theological disciplines represented by biblical studies, church history, moral, systematic and philosophical theology, apologetics, and the like, we can readily add such fields as sociology, anthropology, communications, psychology, and the like. To be sure, it is unrealistic to think that any one person be able to draw on all these disciplines. Here we can have an appropriate division of labor; we can well imagine different scholars bringing to the table their own particular expertise to the field. Indeed it is precisely both the breadth and specificity of the disciplines involved that can make evangelism such an interesting and absorbing field. We can expect in the light of this a wide variety of scholarly literature and a very rich conversation within the field as a whole.

Moreover, we can be sure that when the work in the relevant disciplines is brought into the arena of evangelism there will be a loop back effect, that is, a transformation of the data, evidence, insights, materials, that have been brought, say, from biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and the like. In my own case the effects of ten years of work in evangelism on my own thinking on a host of issues has been incalculable. Thus reading church history from inside the field of evangelism has completely altered my take on the early centuries of church history. I no longer read the history of the church merely through the lens of early institutional and doctrinal developments. Institutional and doctrinal developments are relocated in the whole process of the

evangelization of the Roman Empire, so that institutional and intellectual developments are intimately related to spiritual formation in the gospel and in the faith of the church. More specifically, I see, say, Augustine, not just as our Plato, brimful of speculative possibilities about memory or the Trinity, but also as a hard-pressed spiritual director, a persuasive evangelistic preacher, and friend of the needy. In addition, my whole interpretation of the early creeds has been transformed. Rather than seeing the creeds as an exercise in socialization, or as a means of setting boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy, or even as an exercise in liturgical doxology, I have reconnected the creeds to baptism and to catechesis, reconceiving them with the wider canonical heritage of the church as indispensable means of grace in the cultivation of faith, conversion, and holiness.[4]

In turn this has completely revolutionized my conception of systematic theology. This started when I became puzzled as to the origins of the loci of systematic theology. If you omit prolegomena, they come, of course, from the early creeds, as the creeds were taught in the great catechetical schools of the third and fourth centuries. On the other side of this I rediscovered and went on to reappropriate the original intention of systematic theology one finds in the work of figures like Origen, Augustine, the Cappadocians, and the like. Thus I have become committed to systematic theology as a form of university level catechesis. Its proper service is the spiritual and intellectual life of the church; it presupposes the appropriation of the gospel, conversion, and significant Christian initiation; and it cannot be carried out either without radical repentance and spiritual illumination, or without the deploying the most rigorous intellectual reflection. Making this move renders odious the standard disparaging remarks that one hears from time to time from professional theologians. It will no longer do to pit the highest work we can do in the university with the more mundane work of catechesis in the church.[5] Whether I shall ever deliver the goods publicly and be able to provide an adequate vindication of this move remains to be seen.[6]

Part of what is at stake in this project is the radical repositioning the standard prolegomena into a new arena that I now like to call the epistemology of theology. And within that arena I have been deeply influenced by encountering the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in coming to believe the gospel in the first place, a topic central to the phenomenology and theology of conversion. This central theme had no deep intellectual significance until I started linking it up with recent work in reliabilism, virtue theory, and the fascinating work of Alvin Plantinga on proper function.[7] Once the latter are put in place the liturgical and spiritual practices, whether of

the catechesis of the patristic period or the practices of revivalism in the modern period, take on an epistemological significance that is easily missed by a more prosaic reading of the data. The pay off for the epistemology of theology remains to be seen.[8]

What I have indicated here with respect to my own work would apply *mutatis mutandis* to any other range of disciplines or fields of study. So just as the scholars in evangelism should mine the work in feminist theology for relevant insights, say, about sin, so the field of feminist studies would be enriched by feed back from the study of evangelism. Think, for instance, of what might be learned about feminism from careful attention to the work of women evangelists in the history of the church. Equally, it is obvious that the study of evangelism can benefit enormously from the welter of psychological studies of conversion. However, think of the way the psychological study of conversion might be improved if we were to take seriously the radically thick descriptions that show up in testimonies or in the literature on spiritual formation and which would be front and center in the study of conversion within evangelism. Furthermore, students of evangelism need, for a host of reasons, to pay attention to studies of Islam as we find them in religious studies. Once we had completed this initial phase of the work, think of what would happen in the study of Islam if we were explore in depth its theories and practices of evangelism. It will take time before anything like this is likely to happen, of course, yet we should hold out for the best from our colleagues.

It will be clear by now that teaching evangelism can takes its place with integrity in theological education. Training in the practices and skills of the actual ministry of evangelism should indeed find their place within the field of evangelism. We need to bring every relevant scrap of data and evidence for out proposals; one crucial network of data is that which we gain from the actual practice of evangelism, say, in evangelistic preaching, witnessing, catechesis, initial spiritual formation, church planting, cross-cultural ministry, and the like. This is why we are rightly wary of a purely disengaged study of evangelism. My own practice, limited though it is, comes from active involvement in the ministry of my local church and from regular tours of duty every summer in a new missionary situation in Karaganda, Kazakhastan. How far we pursue the matter of training in our seminary courses is a matter of appropriate judgment. What I want to pursue here, however, is the rationale for locating evangelism clearly and roundly within education.

We can see the importance of this when we explore the crucial difference between the concept of training and the concept of education. Imagine, for a moment, the difference between sex training and sex education. What would be the difference between a

course that was billed as sex training and one that was billed as a course in sex education? Here are the relevant differences. First, a course in sex education would be broad in scope and orientation. It would explore the nature of sex as it relates to the nature of the body, to questions of identity, to virtue and vice, to the family, to disease and health, and the like. Second, we can expect that a course in sex education will not dodge the crucial normative issues that swirl around the topic of sex. Hence it would have to explore how best to think about sexuality and sexual activity. It would not be enough just to do a grand tour of the terrain; the teacher would be expected to articulate the best wisdom possible in the field. There would, in a real sense, be the handing over of a critical and informed tradition of information and wisdom, together with some sense of how that information and wisdom was gained and with how they are to be evaluated, honed, enriched, reordered, complefixied, renegotiated, and the like. Thirdly, all this has to be handed over in such a way that the student appreciates what is handed over. It is not enough merely to receive and regurgitate, or to settle for superficial understanding. There has to be genuine engagement, the fostering of good judgment, the cultivation of discernment, and the enabling of students to find their own voice in the welter of options on offer.

I do not need here to make in great detail what would be at stake in offering a course in sex training. The whole affair would be reduced, say, to an initial decision on the nature and explicit end of sexual activity that would lead to a further decision on how best causally to reach that end. So we might conceive of sexual activity along the lines, say, of a good in-door sport, like racket ball, and then teach a set of techniques that would secure the results set and agreed by the participants. So training sets store primarily by an initial description of ends, a causal analysis of the achievement of ends, and a mastering of relevant techniques determined for the most part by a further means-end analysis that presupposes the prior causal analysis.

The relevance of these remarks to the field of evangelism conceived as a genuinely educational enterprise is obvious. Beyond merely engaging in courses that would foster certain skills in evangelism, we need courses that locate the ministry of evangelism in the wider context of mission, church, social and geographical context, and the very history of redemption itself. We need to take our lives in our hands and make normative judgments all down the line from the concept of evangelism, to its characteristic virtues and vices, to its proper place in the church, right through to the practices that are most fitting in our situation. And we need to teach in such a way that students find their own voice and begin to make healthy, coherent, informed, and mature decisions in their ministries.

We have now segued explicitly into the topic of teaching. Here I want to register a warning and advocate a more general option. The convergence of new technology and the aftermath of behaviorism have put pressure on teachers and students to think of education as an exercise in the transference of skills that can be impersonally taught and measured. This is visible in the current tendency to think primarily in terms of degree programs, learning, and assessment. It is also manifest in the drive to develop goals and measurable objectives for every degree program, then for every course, and then for every unit and session of the course. In these circumstances it becomes natural to exploit the new possibilities opened up by technology and to transpose education and teaching into the learning of specifiable information, particular concepts, intellectual skills, and the like. These are then packaged and delivered within or without the classroom in an appropriate and efficient manner. In these circumstance the teacher becomes a kind of sophisticated technician, causally manipulating a host of exercises to bring about certain preset and desired outcomes.[9]

I shall avoid the temptation to unravel in any great detail the etiology, the philosophical assumptions, and the well-concealed value judgments that often accompany, if not generate, this outlook. Further, I shall eschew the temptation to reduce it to the illegitimate transfer of the ideals, the techniques, and the values of the business world to the field of teaching and education. Instead let me delineate briefly an alternative vision of teaching and education.

We begin by locating our work not in cyberspace or in the business world, but in unique communities of scholars, teachers, and students, together with the traditions, virtues, and intellectual dispositions that they embody, critically transmit, and reconstruct. The ideal home for evangelism is the seminary, whether within or without the universities. This means that persons rather than skills or techniques are at the center of the work. The first requirement is a faculty of scholars and teachers who have been initiated into the field of evangelism and have mastered the delicate art of teaching. One of the jobs of the professor is to profess, that is, to exhibit, transmit, and cultivate the best wisdom he or she can muster in the field. Students, in turn, are invited to enter not just the world of the professor, but into the extended conversation, revolutionary changes, manifold arguments, and relevant data that make up a living tradition of inquiry. In time they will find their own voice in the conversation, abandon the half-truths and prejudices they have brought to the discussion, multiply and enrich the insights they already have or naturally discover, and develop that range of intellectual virtues that are constitutive of a well educated person.

I see no reason why this vision of teaching cannot be applied directly to evangelism. The goal is to develop a certain kind of person, that is, one who will be both an evangelist and teacher and leader of evangelism in the local church. Of course, this will involve the learning of various skills and practices, like learning to preach evangelistically, to lead someone to Christ, to help new believer's find their feet in the faith, and the like. How far this requires specific training, I will leave aside here. However, we also want to see the development of persons who are informed, who can make sensitive judgments, and who can readily identify their own vices and blind spots in their practices and their reflection on those practices. In this work, it is disastrous if we eliminate the role of friendship, of sensitive mentoring, of good fortune and luck, and of all those tacit elements that we all have experienced in teaching and learning at its best, but that can never be fully captured conceptually nor even begin to be delineated in tips and techniques.

To be sure, we can explore to what extent we can reduce this whole process to learning, goals, objectives, and the like; and we can always revisit our rather roughshod methods of assessment and see how we might improve; and we can explore boldly how far we can make use of the new resources opened up by new technologies. In the end, however, teaching is a delicate art. It involves the interaction of persons; it requires irreducible decisions about value and ends that cannot be concealed beneath the jargon of objectivity and neutrality; and it depends crucially on a host of decisions about causality that are deeply elusive. There are mysteries here that we eliminate at our peril; much of the time we have little or no clue how we succeed; again and again we driven back to simple trust in ourselves, in our materials, and in our traditional practices, like, assigning readings, conducting seminars, grading papers, working one on one on a confusing issue, and setting examinations. We rely on chemistry, on the ethos of the class, on making virtues out of difficult confrontations, and on following up a line of inquiry that was never anticipated when we started. In short, we are engaged in thoroughly human endeavor where we ever need the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This reference to the Holy Spirit is not one we are apt to find in the modern academy. It would, of course, have made perfect sense to patristic figures, like Augustine, and to medieval figures, like Bonaventure; in their vision of teaching and learning, even coming to know that two plus two equals four depended on the inner light of the Holy Spirit. This makes next to no sense in our world, for illuminationist theories of knowledge have long been dead and buried. So what are we to do? Should we quietly eschew all reference to the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or

should we try and translate such discourse into secular analogues that will do the job just as well?

What we do here will show how serious we are about evangelism in the academy, for if we hesitate or baulk at this point we fail to make exactly those gains that are needed for all theological education. We need to keep our nerve and realize that in the teaching of evangelism we can perhaps make a beachhead for a fresh openness to the Holy Spirit in the academy. We surely know this within evangelism, namely, that given the stark reality of sin and our propensity to corruption, there is no knowledge of God without the concomitant work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. "No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit."[10] I propose we extend this in this way. In teaching and thinking about those ministries that constitute evangelism we constantly need the guidance, the wisdom, the compassion, the cheerfulness, and all those other gifts that the good and life giving Holy Spirit sheds so generously abroad in the church and in creation generally. To abandon this is to discard precisely the kind of insight that comes from within evangelism and that needs to be heard elsewhere.

We can approach this point from another angle, a Christological angle. If we bring Christ into the academy as he is known and experienced in evangelism, we will surely find ourselves posing fundamental questions about our teaching. Suppose the Jesus of the gospel and of the gospels were to apply for a tenured position in evangelism, should we give it to him? We can think of two counts on which he would be immediately rejected. First, he has no published material to be sent out for peer review. Second, he would fail the requirements for teaching that are quickly and quietly becoming the norm in the accrediting agencies. Thus he has no books and no journal articles; and his whole teaching style and practice provides a radical alternative to the quest for clinically specified goals, measurable outcomes, and objective assessment.

Given the crisis that Jesus poses at this point, it should not surprise us in the least that the academy has its own way of house training and domesticating Jesus. It is called the "quest for the historical Jesus." This is a brilliantly orchestrated attempt to cut Jesus down to size, to keep him buried in the tomb, to hold him within the narrow confines of a historicist and naturalistic metaphysics.[11] If we know anything in the field of evangelism, we know that this is not the real Jesus of history and faith. This is not the Jesus who has inaugurated the kingdom of God, who has died for the sins of the world, who has broken the back of the principalities and powers, who has baptized us in the Holy Spirit, and who has instituted the Church, and who even now across the

world binds up the broken hearted and brings not peace but a sword.

I began this paper with personal anecdotes about my initial experience in evangelism that clearly indicated that people were embarrassed about evangelism. Those anecdotes dovetail with a sense in many quarters that evangelism is a stepchild in the academy, that it can never really find its place within it. I have responded to all this by showing how evangelism can stand on its own feet and how it can both draw on and enrich the feeder disciplines and fields on which it depends. Maybe all this is mere spitting in the wind. The real issue cuts far more deeply; and the real issue is that the Jesus who is at the heart of Christian evangelism poses a crisis for the academy as we currently know it. If I am right in this, our best strategy may be to stay the course until the academy itself is redeemed from some of its deadly forms and begins to bear its own unique first fruits of the kingdom of God. When that begins to happen, then we will truly know that the academy can handle evangelism as a fully-fledged field of inquiry in its own right.

NOTES

[1] The seminal work on this issue can be found in Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

[2] For a widely influential and seminal discussion along these lines see W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," in his *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (London: Chatto and Windis, 1964), 157-191.

[3] Within this we can pick up the persistent concern of postmodernists to ferret out and hear voices that are all too readily ignored or marginalized. To tackle the bigger issues in philosophy of education developed within postmodernism cannot be pursued here. For a useful starting point, see S. Aronowitz and H. A. Giroux, *Postmodern Education: Politics, Culture and Social Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Evangelists have done more than their share of reaching and empowering voices that lie outside the contours of traditional educational institutions. For a fascinating essay related to this see Vicki Tolar Burton, "John Wesley and the Liberty to Speak: The Rhetorical and Literacy Practices of Early Methodism," in *The Journal of the Conference on College Composition and Communication*, 53 (2001), number 1, 65-91.

[4] For the full explication of this thesis see my *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology, From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

[5] I once overheard a professor chastising a new group of students with the remark: "You can now forget all that Sunday School stuff; we are here to do the real thing."

[6] I am pursuing this line with some care in my current teaching within systematic theology

[7] Se especially his three volumes: *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[8] I am pursuing this matter in my own current work in the epistemology of theology.

[9] I touch here the tip of a very big iceberg, but I trust enough has been furnished to identify the iceberg in question. For a splendid discussion of some of the issues involved in this and the ensuing alternative sketched here, see Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground, Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993). Extensive reading in the work of John Henry Newman has shaped much of my thinking in this domain.

[10] 1 Cor. 12: 3.

[11] I have explored the issues on faith and history related to what I say here in *Divine Revelation and Limits of Historical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). I have also addressed some of the issues in "At the Crossroads with Crossan", unpublished.

Saving Souls Beyond Modernity: How Evangelism Can Save the Church and Make it Relevant Again

David Fitch

Whether they are postmodern or post-something else,[1] people born after the sixties threaten traditional ways of doing evangelism. They experience and engage truth differently than previous generations. The structure of how they know has changed. As a result, they just are not impacted by the ways Christians have traditionally presented truth and defended their faith. In response, some evangelists have simply written these people off as relativists and assert more vigorously the value of absolute truth in their evangelism.[2] Others have just avoided this "relativism issue" entirely and instead address postmodernism through repackaging the image of their Sunday morning worship services to appeal to the cultural manifestations of postmodernism either in music, media or other aesthetics.[3] But either response, I would argue, is bad evangelism because each response avoids engaging the assumptions and way of understanding reality of the people we are trying to reach with the gospel. Yet, this is not necessary. Because once we get past the initial reactions, it becomes apparent that postmodern people may embrace some chaos in their culture but they do not reject truth in its entirety. They might suspect truth known only in words or propositions but they respect a truth that can be seen and experienced in life. Postmodern people, as I shall refer to them, demand a living truth and this can provide the basis for communicating the gospel message.

In the following, I describe two important shifts in the way postmodern people know truth. I then show how some evangelistic practices need discarding because they are married to assumptions and language that no longer exist for postmodern people. I propose a different basis for sharing the gospel with postmodern people over some understandings of truth we can all embrace. Out of this I then propose an approach to evangelism that makes sense for saving souls beyond modernity. It is an evangelism that requires a shift of Copernican proportions. It requires the display of the truth, not propositions, deeper understandings of salvation, not four-law

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formulas. And whereas traditionally the church has sent evangelists out with the message of the gospel, this evangelism requires the church itself to become the message. In effect, evangelism to postmoderns requires the church to take its own salvation as seriously as it does others' and in the process make its own way of life impossible to ignore as the standard bearer for what is real and relevant in a fragmented and seeking world.

From Modernity to PostModernity: The Shift

What has changed about truth in postmodernity? I propose that there are two shifts to the way people experience knowledge in postmodernity. These two shifts are part of the new structure of the way people know, which is engulfing wide sectors of culture educated post eighties. The origins of this structure are the academic institutions of the West, but the effects of this structure are widening throughout Western culture.

One of these shifts is the way postmoderns experience modern science, As opposed to most modern people, postmoderns no longer accept naively modern science as the central authority for their lives. From its birth with Isaac Newton until the present, modern science proved its ability to produce material improvements in the way we live, travel, deal with disease and communicate. Scientific method consistently yielded "hard" findings that are verifiable, dependable and useful in improving human life. People of modernity therefore tend to trust in the hard sciences' ability to deliver truth and progress. They believe in science as the objective source of truth totally free of prejudice. This is no longer true for postmoderns.

Contrary to modernity, philosophers like Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polyani articulate how science is a theory laden, faith requiring enterprise.[4] They argue that, from Copernicus to Newton, Einstein to Quantum, scientific theories have changed several times, each time changing "paradigms" for the way we understand the world. This was not because the objective world changed. It was because science constructed better theories to understand the world for certain purposes. A "molecule" is a theory now, not a representation of the way things are. "Molecules" are a structure that helps us understand how certain things work, not a physical fact about the world. Science therefore is not objective at all. Instead it is a purveyor of webs of belief; of "paradigms" that require leaps of faith. As a result, science is just one more way of depicting the world that has its positives as well as its limits. As a result, it may yield powerful control over physical nature, yet it cannot explain a lot of human behavior and is stumped when speaking about the

moral and spiritual issues of human life. Even worse, science and historiography reveal themselves to be open to interpretation and a power agenda. Witness the use of science to argue equally well for and against the legitimization of the homosexual life style using either genetic or statistical data.[5] Witness the use of the scientific method to argue both for evolution and creation as theories of life's origin in the universe. Science therefore, is as prejudiced and perspectival as any other realm of knowledge. In postmodernity, people recognize that science is limited, prone to an agenda, sometimes reductionistic and given to a narrow understanding of the world.

This postmodern critique of science disturbs some Christians because they believe it necessarily leads to truth being relative. Such a relativism however, is not the only option. A more powerful option is carried out by Alasdair MacIntyre and his followers who argue for the inherent repository for proven truth in the progression of traditions.[6] Whatever the options, postmodernity deposes science as the indisputable arbiter of all truth in modernity. Science limits reality. And it must take its place alongside other traditions as an historical tradition to be examined and appreciated for its pluses and minuses. In the process, traditions can become the central enclave for the testing and proving of truth.[7]

A second shift in reality is the way postmoderns doubt that objective truth is accessible to the critical individual mind. Most modern people trust unabashedly in the powers of the individual mind to arrive at basic truths. Originating in the 17th century, modern thinkers struggled for a certainty that would stand above the violence and tyranny they were experiencing in the European religious traditions. They mistrusted truth handed down in traditions because it caused wars and other abuse. To avoid religious wars, thinkers like Descartes and Kant exalted the reasoning powers of the individual as the source of objective truth.[8] The individual self could stand above and detached from traditions and make free judgments on truth based on his or her reason. This has formed how modern people see reality and understand truth. It lies behind the way modern people defend the individual's rights to make up her own mind and trust their own heart in searching for truth[9].

The field of postmodern hermeneutics however undermines this confidence. Thinkers like Derrida and Gadamer expose how the human self is culture bound. They examine the individual quest for truth in the written word and show how cultural and ideological forces shape the work behind each text and each mind. For Derrida, there is a Western "presence" in most literature of the West. It has its power interests and must be deconstructed in order to hear other voices. In the process, there is no self sufficiently detached from culture to make objective observations. All knowledge is culture

bound and, even worse, has a power agenda. It requires "deconstruction." The bottom line is that for postmodern people, the modernist objective knower and the individual's objective truth does not exist.

Some Christians also fret over this demise of objective truth. Postmodernism nonetheless insightfully reveals powerful ways the self is formed out of cultures and how knowledge is bound to cultural histories. Yet the postmodern critique of objective truth does not necessarily require the total demise of objective truth. There is an objective truth out there. Certainly God is the source of objective truth. The question is, who can and in what way can we approach it? At the very least, Christians can appreciate the need to examine the ways we can know within the limits of our human condition and the nature of our personal formation.

In summary, the culture of postmoderns undermines two main assumptions of modernity; that scientific truth is objective and objective truth is available to the powers of individual reasoning. Any attempts to evangelize postmoderns based upon these assumptions will likely fail.

The Waning Effectiveness of Evidentiary Apologetics and Seeker Services

Two evangelism practices that will wane in effectiveness because they are grounded in these modern assumptions are (1.) evidentiary apologetics and (2.) "seeker services."

The first practice of evidentiary apologetics uses modern science to defend Christianity. Authors using this strategy typically build a scientific case for the veracity of Scripture and the resurrection using historical and scientific evidence. The immensely popular Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and Lee Stroebel's *The Case for Faith* are two prominent examples of this strategy.[10] Creationist science and the "inerrancy" defense of Scripture are other examples. These authors and their strategies depend upon the hearer believing in the authority and objectivity of modern science. But that belief has waned within postmodernity. Hence, in postmodernity, evidentiary apologetics comes off sounding like an agenda ridden manipulation of scientific methods. Scientific defenses of the Bible fail to carry weight because the "inerrancy" defense assumes that there is an objective scientific basis for "what is an error." As the German historical critical method has revised its so-called objective conclusions regarding Scripture again and again, it has revealed itself again and again to be as subjective and "agenda ridden" as any premodern tradition.[11] Consequently, efforts like these make less and less sense to the postmodern when

they are based in scientific method and modernist terms like "inerrant." In postmodernity, the power of evidentiary apologetics wanes and the authority of scientific defenses fade.

A bigger postmodern problem however, is the way evidentiary apologetics undermines Christian authority in a person's conversion. In the earliest stages of evangelism, evidentiary apologetics endorses the authority of science. If I can prove it scientifically, it says, then Scripture must be true. In the earliest moments of one's conversion, science and historiography are set up as final arbiters of truth, not the Scriptures, Holy Spirit or the church. Postmodern psychology and cultural anthropology expose how the initiation process shapes authority and ways of seeing in the initiate for a lifetime. Evidentiary apologetics therefore, shapes the new believer to forever look over his or her shoulder at science as the authenticating truth test versus Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit working in his people. Evidentiary apologetics falls short therefore on another count in postmodernity. It fails because it tacitly trains the new initiate to depend upon science as a higher source of truth than the Scriptures given in Jesus Christ. It teaches the new believer to trust science more than the Scriptures of the church, both of which are historical traditions in light of postmodernity.

The second practice of "seeker services" assumes objective truth is available to the rational powers of the isolated individual. They therefore seek to craft the presentation to be as appealing as possible; to draw in the individual so they will eventually hear the message. The seeker service strategy works to draw the seeker into a large anonymous setting where he or she can view a professionally produced, entertaining presentation of the gospel that attempts to be contemporary and appeal to "felt needs."[12] "Seeker service" strategies do not shy away from marketing to an audience, using psychology and other forms of self-fulfillment to interpret the gospel.[13] Postmoderns however, suspect the machinations of consumer-oriented messages to have power over them to make "buy" decisions. Instead postmoderns recognize truth most where it is lived day to day one with another. The postmodern is convinced of truth through participation, not consumer appeals, through wholly lived display, not reasoned arguments. Seeker services will still work for the boomers and those raised in modernity either by age or in the Evangelical subculture. These people of modernity were taught to trust only their individual minds or experiences. Postmoderns know their minds or experiences can be manipulated. Modernist boomers are suspicious of tradition in the true Enlightenment sense. They are the ultimate feeling generation, self indulgent and focused on their own "felt needs." Post modernity however, finds a generation that suspects the blatant consumer oriented

persuasion of the dominant media. Their "felt needs" have an ever shorter MTV-like life span. Some of this Next generation sees marketing and advertising as capitalist intrusions with an agenda to form people certain ways so as to benefit certain economic power interests.[14] They respect truth that is lived. The postmodern generation may enjoy the show for a short while. But they are looking for a home; a community wherein a belonging can take root and the moral fabric of truth can be borne out. If postmodern culture is for real, seeker services are running out of time. The next generation seeks community over anonymity and is over dosed on consumer appeals to felt needs. Postmoderns desire something bigger to be transformed into.

Yet more problematic for "seeker services" than waning effectiveness is the postmodern revelation that seeker services initiate converts into a Christianity that forms them to be self-seeking. Seeker services often present salvation as self-fulfillment, as the answer to "felt needs."[15] They present the gospel as attractive, professional, successful. And despite the emphasis on small groups and community, the seeker strategy initiates the new believer through a portal where most people make isolated decisions in a sea of anonymity, the so-called mega-church setting. Isolated as an individual, the "unchurched Harry" can decide to follow Christ for self-centered reasons, because it is attractive, makes me feel better or takes care of my needs. The mega-church setting that often develops tends to make the church into a mall where you get saved and then use the church to take care of all the needs a Christian might have. Postmodernity, however, reveals the danger that individualist evangelism trains new Christians to be consumers of Christianity and God.[16] It forms the mind of the seeker so powerfully that it is too much of a "bait and switch" to later ask the new believer to then deny himself/herself and follow Christ. Such an evangelism method does not recognize that making salvation into an individualistic transaction between a person and God based solely in that person's desire to escape from hell or meet a felt need may in fact not only fall short of the full intent of Scripture, but initiate that person into another form of self centered existence.

In summary, postmodernity undermines old ways of doing evangelism that are based in modernity such as evidentiary apologetics and seeker service strategies. Postmodernity jeopardizes evangelistic practices that depend explicitly on the authority of science and/or the sovereign powers of the isolated individual mind. In addition, however, the cultural insights of postmodernity expose how these same practices may tacitly shape the character of the convert in ways that work against the gospel of Christ taking root in people's lives. Postmodernism reveals that the means of initiation

form the character and the mind of the individual as much as a rational decision.

A Postmodern Basis For Evangelism

The question, then, is how do we make sense of the Christian claim that "Jesus Christ is Lord" in a postmodern world where old ways to truth have broken down? The answer is we display what these words mean in the way we live and worship so that its reality, once displayed, cannot be denied, only rejected or entered into. We will persuade through living displays of truth, not rational one on one arguments. We will orient salvation away from an individually centered transaction to a salvation based in God's cosmic activity in Christ and the invitation to participate in something bigger than one's self in the Kingdom of God. The church becomes the postmodern portal to truth. It becomes the basis for evangelism. And as a result, both truth and salvation will look differently.

Truth, for instance, will be entered by personally participating in it, not by hearing it rationally from a detached vantage point. Postmoderns need to "taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8)." They must test it; know the truth by its "fruit." This view of truth may mean that many postmoderns will be saved through osmosis as opposed to one on one persuasion. Such a view of truth might limit the possibility for objective truth for isolated individuals, but it does not sacrifice truth. Instead, it situates truth in location. It forces the messenger to live truth, not just talk or argue about it. Postmodern evangelism therefore must happen amidst living truth. Evangelists therefore must have a place to embody truth before they can speak it. This means the onus is on the church to become the center of living truth. Christian claims will only make sense amidst postmodernity when they are lived and participated in among a Body.

Such a view of truth will invigorate the importance of historical traditions as carriers of living truth.[17] Historical traditions carry truth, prove it by living it and testing it out in people's lives. In traditions, Christians become witnesses to a specific reality of Jesus Christ lived in their history, not advocates of an argument that has universal appeal.[18] Traditions only rationalize the truth as they embody it. They have a depth that cannot be denied. Postmodernism returns truth to the work of traditions. The power of Scripture as centuries-old narratives carries more weight than a rational argument for inerrancy. Postmoderns gather around stories. In the same way, postmodern evangelism recognizes that truth is best communicated as it is lived in the life of a Body of Christ out of its (his)story and its stories, not one on one combat via evidentiary apologetics. Instead, the church itself becomes the apologetic.[19] As

the truth of the gospel is worked out in real lives living together, it cannot be debated or individualized, only invited into and the church thereby becomes the center for evangelism. Modernist evangelists often preach that what the culture needs is absolute truth, but what the culture needs is a church which believes the truth so absolutely it actually lives it out. Living traditions of depth that tell stories of wonder provide the basis for Christian claims of Christ's Lordship to make sense in the postmodern world.

In regard to salvation, the Christian account of salvation in Christ alone can only make sense in postmodernity when that salvation takes shape in real lives. And if it truly is a gift, this salvation must be bigger than our own selves. Salvation must be more than an intellectual transaction where the individual receives forgiveness for faith, salvation from God's wrath and a justified legal status before God based upon some intellectual assent. Postmoderns recognize the folly of an isolated individual coming to truth via another isolated individual. And they recognize the folly of isolated individualism and its inability to be freed from cultural formation. Without a corresponding way of life, individualized salvation looks like cognitive consumerist manipulation for the postmodern. There must be something larger to be invited into. Christians therefore must preach and embody the reality that salvation is much more cosmic in scope than a transaction to take care of an individual's legal guilt before God. The church must recover its teaching on sanctification, healing and the old Wesleyan "society" meetings. It must recapture the cosmic scope of the classical "Christus Victor" model of the atonement in the ancient church. It must preach that although salvation begins with an individual's trust in Christ for forgiveness of sin, the new believer is invited into the social territory of his Lordship where one can live the victory over sin and death that Christ accomplished on the cross and resurrection.

Postmodern evangelism then will avoid commoditizing salvation into an individualist consumerist transaction. It will focus away from scaring people out of hell to inviting people into a compelling way of life. It will realize that making salvation about being saved from hell irrespective of being saved to new life cheapens it into an a piece of individualist knowledge, bordering on Gnosticism, that does not take root in embodied lives.[20] In postmodernity, truth is about character. Religious truth can no longer be relegated to the realm of private feeling or preference. This is because modern science, which pushed it there originally, no longer reigns supreme. Truth is in the living. Any evangelism therefore that separates one's renewed legal status before God from the new life we have in Christ strips the gospel of its power for a

postmodern evangelism. For the postmodern world, justification cannot be separated from sanctification. The basis for a compelling Christian account of salvation in postmodernity is a changed life

Postmodern evangelism therefore must be based in a living body of Christ that lives the truth and possesses the salvation of a Cosmic Lord. Then the church can quit proving the truth of the gospel rationally or scientifically and let its power speak for itself. The church can quit selling "escape from hell" when they believe their life in Christ is superior to the life in the world. A whole new mindset of evangelistic practices can then be built around this.

Practices That Make Sense

What will such evangelistic practices look like to postmoderns?

First, postmodern evangelism will take place in the believer's homes. The postmodern church will re-learn the practice of inviting our neighbors into our homes for dinner, sitting around asking questions and listening. The home is where we live, where we converse and settle conflict, where we raise children. We arrange our furniture and set forth our priorities there in the home. We pray for each other there. We share hospitality out of God's blessings there. Inviting someone into our home for dinner says "Here, take a look, I am taking a risk and inviting you into my life." It is so exceeding rare in a fragmented culture of strangers, that just doing it speaks volumes as to what it means to be a Christian in a world of strangers. Inviting a stranger into one's home alongside another church friend shares and immerses that person into some of the bounty of fellowship and commonality Christians share. We do not need to say anything we would not ordinarily say. We do not need a method or an underhanded conniving plan to convince them of Christ. That is the Holy Spirit's work. We just live until this person asks what is different about the way you live? or comes to you asking, my wife and I are getting a divorce, what would you do in my situation? Postmodern evangelism incubates in the climates of hospitality, in the places of conversation, posing questions, listening to the strangers in our midst. In the process, we Christians grow when the stranger challenges us in ways we have not been confronted yet. And when they finally do ask, "Who is this God that enables you to live the way you do?" we take the opportunity to invite them to our worship together to see this God we worship as Lord who has invited them into a fellowship with himself that makes life beyond compare. Hospitality as a way of evangelism may be as old as the Celts.[21] Yet inviting a stranger into my home for dinner is

an evangelistic practice that in itself must become a way of life for the postmodern church.

Likewise, a postmodern strategy for evangelism will teach Christians how to journey together in groups of twenty to thirty people who meet together monthly to share fellowship and discernment. Postmodern evangelism is about living truth and this happens among Christians and their communities of friendship. Here we share our joys and our sorrows (Rom. 12:15). We meet to share barbecue and games of croquet, or whatever social rituals make sense. And when one of us gets sick, there is a time of discernment of sin and faith and the elders pour oil and lay on hands. The power of God's Spirit is invoked for the purposes of his kingdom in this person (James 5:16). Other rituals, including sending out someone for mission, affirming a marriage, affirming a gift, and the Lord's Supper give witness to who we are and the power of God's salvation in Jesus Christ is set loose in our midst. These gatherings are Petrie dishes for postmodern evangelism. Christians invite strangers to these places and there they love strangers and display the manner of life we have in Christ Jesus. In these groups, we can truly listen to our neighbor's questions and trust the Spirit will lead us into all truth. In these communities of conversation we share the journey of life's most sacred moments and are witnesses mutually to the activity of God in each others lives. Here is the perfect social manifestation of truth postmoderns require to be compelled to the gospel.

These communities can function to form, instruct and nurture Christians in the living out of certain aspects of the Christian life. Such communities can mentor and teach strangers in the Christian ways of raising children, grieving loss, supporting the elderly and forming Christian marriages. These groups go beyond twelve step groups to foster specific Christian character in community sufficient for a particular Christian task. For example, in regards to marriage, these communities gather regularly to teach the basis of Christian dating and marriage. Beyond the normal singles group, these meeting times train Christians into how Christian marriages are different from other kinds of marriages. They show how forgiveness, truthfulness, faithfulness and servanthood form the marriage we have through Jesus Christ. They are informed by God's purposes for our sexuality. In the process of testing out a couple and affirming their marriage, a community participates and becomes the basis of the Holy Spirit forming a new way of life in this couple, often in stark contrast to a world of self-centered marriage and divorce. All of this witnesses to the abundant powers of salvation set free in the community of Christ to achieve God's fullest purposes in marriage, something the world rarely sees, but

cannot help but be compelled by as they witness the God whose victory over sin enables such faithfulness and love to take place between a man and a woman. The same community process can be applied to "widows and widowers" and any number of recovery issues. Out of these places, the stranger sits among us, participates in the meanings of the gospel, and postmodern evangelism takes place.

Lastly, and most importantly, postmodern evangelism happens in authentic fully embodied Christian worship.[22] Worship, above all other activities, meets the challenges of postmodern evangelism. Here, in worship, Christians present salvation, not in a rationalized cognitive word only, but the rich display of mighty acts in symbol and art. Worship does not divide the scientific from the religious, the material from the spiritual. As with postmodernity, worship embraces mystery, body, soul and spirit. It springs forth out of the depths of its traditions and brings the ancient into the future. It therefore cannot be denied because it is real. It cannot be argued with, only embraced or rejected. In this way, Christian worship is the ultimate postmodern act.

In worship, the church becomes the center for evangelism. Using all the arts as well as skills of the Word, Christians re-present the story of who God is in song and dance, visual art and drama. He becomes present in a special way in the mystery and power of the Lord's Supper, services of healing and the power of joint praise in song. Christians convey the depth and history of our God through the sacred times of renewal and formation we have in the church's calendar. Christians enter the awe of who God is in Christian worship as they use the full expanse of the arts to re-present the God we worship. In all of this, the Christian bows before his Lordship in the display of his glory. Christian worship therefore is a good place for the postmodern to meet God because it is here she can stand before the depth and wonder of what God has done down through the ages and understand herself in light of that. Such a worship need not be "seeker sensitive." A stranger entering worship may not and should not receive of the Lord's Supper. But he or she can witness the renewal and transformation of a people before her very eyes. And as the outsider did in 1 Cor. 14:25, the unbeliever may end up bowing before God declaring "God is really among you" because he was confronted body, soul and mind with the God of Jesus Christ in worship.

All of these places, the home, the community, the sacred space of worship, are the spaces of postmodern evangelism. They speak to an evangelism that invites one in to see the message before one hears the message in words. They speak to an evangelism that is willing to save via subtle osmosis versus immediate rational

persuasion. It is an evangelism that meets postmoderns who do not trust individual argument, slick presentation or scientific proofs. They want to come see and be confronted by the reality of Jesus Christ. The practices of postmodern evangelism therefore must converge in the living breathing spaces of the local body of Christ.

From Crusades to Church Planting, from "Just as I am" to Baptism, How the Church Can Become Relevant Again through Evangelism

In postmodernity then, the church as living body is the vortex of evangelism. Christians no longer impart universal truths to individual minds outside the church. They live truth in God's power sufficiently to compel the lost to come and see his Lordship in full display in a worship service. Salvation is more than a matter of one's individual status before God. It is the victory of Christ over sin and death into which Christians invites strangers via the forgiveness of sin and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The postmodern evangelist then does not strive to make the gospel relevant to the categories of the post Christian generation outside the church. He or she seeks to invite them in to something that is real and therefore relevant in the church. In a world where the truth that "Jesus is Lord" is viewed as irrelevant, the task of the postmodern evangelist is not to somehow make his Lordship relevant to that world, but to live his Lordship so truthfully that it makes it impossible for alternative worlds to ignore. In this way, the church becomes supremely relevant in the task of postmodern evangelism.

Postmodern evangelism will therefore contrast with modern evangelism in many ways. In modernity, the goal of evangelism was personal decisions for Christ by individuals and the church could afford to be a sideshow. It was enough for the church to provide support and services to new converts. Hence in modernity, evangelism was often a parachurch endeavor, carried on more ably by specialist organizations outside the church like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Campus Crusade etc.[23] With the arrival of postmodernity the mode of communicating the truth of the gospel shifts from a one-on-one encounter to a one-on-church encounter, from one-on-one well-reasoned arguments and slick presentations to the vivid display of its message in the lives and worship of its people. Such a shift makes evangelism impossible separated from the church. It forces a Copernican type shift upon modernist Christians where the church becomes the center of its evangelism.

It is not that personal decisions for Christ are no longer important. In the postmodern world however, personal decisions will die without a social context in which they are lived out.[24] Personal decisions will die if there is no story into which they make

sense. Maybe in the past, individuals were afforded time to find a home after they decided for Christ at a Crusade because there was an existing powerful ethos of national Protestantism. Postmodernism however is post-Christendom because it is post-any mono-culture. Now, a decision for Christ, if separated from the church and left alone in the sea of self-oriented democratic culture, will deteriorate into another consumer choice, a transaction for a benefit, the escape out of hell, because the powerful cultural ethos trains the person in this way. True evangelism for postmoderns therefore must invite them out of the consumerist ethos of the world and into the alternative world where Jesus is Lord. This must happen if the decisions are to "stick." Evangelism therefore depends upon the existence of living communities of Christ.

Church planting then is the ultimate form of postmodern evangelism.[25] When we go from an Enlightenment based epistemology - viewing the work of evangelism as primarily a communication from one mind to another – to a postmodern reality – where truth is understood as it is lived and displayed – when we go from modernist evangelism –primarily passing out salvation one decision at a time – to the gospel as (his)Story whose viability and power is best delivered as it is lived in a social embodiment - the first course of business is to found communities in that Story. Only then will we be able to show people what we mean when we say they can be "born again." Church planting is the necessary prerequisite to saving souls in postmodernity.

In postmodernity, the focus of evangelism will shift from decisions for Christ to baptisms. The chronology of evangelism will expand from everything that leads up to the personal decision to include everything that happens from that initial decision all the way to baptism. Salvation is something bigger than a self and its decision; it is what that self is invited into in Christ. Postmodern evangelism's defining moment therefore moves from the crisis decision of faith to the initiatory rite of baptism. Salvation is no longer an individual transaction that takes place in the head, it is the participation in the work of Christ, something greater than one's own self-absorption.

Postmodern evangelism therefore requires that Christians retrieve the significance and power of baptism as an initiatory rite. It requires that the church develop processes that link "making a decision for Christ" with baptism and all that lies in between.[26] Baptism will signify more than a "public declaration" of a decision already made, it will signify the entrance - mind, body and soul – into the resurrection of Christ and his rule (Rom. 6:4). And whereas evangelism used to end with the ritual of the candidate walking down the isle to "Just As I Am," now that marks one of

many moments in that person's participation in the salvation process of the Holy Spirit. And churches engage these moments as character forming processes that take one to the place of baptism into the life of Christ. Postmodern evangelism embraces as its work the entire journey from the decision for Christ all the way to baptism, because it is the entry into the world of his Lordship that marks a disciple in postmodernity.

In summary, the postmodern evangelist cannot function within a franchise selling services of Christ. He or she cannot separate from the living Body and sell his wares. He or she requires a colony of the King, full of his culture and life into which she can invite those starved for life and meaning. As if it were an outpost, the church inhabits space amidst a fragmented and decaying world and lives a reality whose fullness lies just ahead (Phil. 3:20). Its evangelism is therefore not a debate. It is not a consumer appeal. It is a carnival in the village, a boisterous parade that marches through town. It displays Christ with marching bands, beautiful floats, vivid symbols and a way of living so powerful it threatens the surrounding principalities and powers. It is the march of victory over sin and death begun in Christ to be consummated in his return. It both celebrates and invites those around to take a look and participate in this wondrous manner of life made possible in Jesus Christ. It is more than a word, more than sight. It is a full-bodied fragrance that cannot be denied, just entered or rejected. It is sweet fulfillment to those who join in; it is bitterness to those who have already chosen death. As a living vibrant people, evangelists do not sell, they just live, not peddle, but speak sincerely, not debate, just witness to God's presence in worship and invite people in to this great victory over sin and death we have in Christ's death and resurrection. In this way, the apostle's description of evangelism in 2 Cor. 2:14-17 is truly postmodern.

NOTES

[1]Academics, sociologists, "church growth experts" have used post-modern, post-Christian, post-Christendom, post-liberal as well as other labels to refer to this generation and the culture they inhabit.

[2]For example, Douglas Groothius, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianit Against The Challenge of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), Donald Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), David Wells, *No Place For Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 65.

[3]See for example Robb Redman 's description of the mindset of postmodernity, the "GenX" generation, and how worship services have responded to it. "The Sound of Enthusiasm, How Generation X is Reshaping Contemporary Worship," *Worship Leader* 10(5) (2001): 27-29.

[4]Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 2nd. Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Lesslie Newbigin has written on this issue in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). On the demise of realism in science see Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) ch.7;

[5]See for instance *Time*, May 21, 2001, "Can Gays Switch Sides?" where the article debates the scientific data for both sides of the homosexual moral arguments.

[6]Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

[7]Lesslie Newbigin articulates the ways in which the authority of traditions works within both the scientific community and within the Christian community. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) ch.3,4

[8]For a description of the sociological milieu of the Religious Wars, which gave rise to modernity, see Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

[9]For an excellent reading of influences in this direction, see Roger Lundin, *Culture of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993)

[10]Two examples are Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub, 1999); Lee Stroebel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

[11]It produced three different "quests" for the historical Jesus each time producing a different Jesus that proved to have more in common with the cultural outlooks of the researchers than any of the particular changes in new data. See Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995) 9-13; N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999) 28-34 for a brief retelling of the history of "quest." The question is, as the standards and conclusions shift outside of Scripture and the church itself, should we continue to pin our defense of Scripture and its concomitant authority upon these outmoded places?

[12]See G.A. Pritchard's extensive discussion on these issues in *Willow Creek Seeker Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) More specifically, on the professional and entertaining presentation see ch. 5-7 on "anonymity" see 104-108 and on "felt needs" see 68-72. For another example see Rick Warren *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) on "felt needs" see ch. 11 and on "anonymity" see pages 258-264.

[13]See Pritchard's extensive observations in *Willow Creek Services*; see especially ch. 17 and pp. 249-257 among other selections in the book.

[14]Few Christian postmodern theorists on church write about this aspect of postmodern culture. The critique of consumerism in church growth and marketing is however rampant (led by Phil Kenneson and James Street, *Selling Out The Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Prerss,1997); Oz Guiness, *Dining with The Devil* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1993) and G.A. Pritchard, *Willow*

Creek Services (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1996). Many postmodern theorists write about the skepticism towards truth and certainty as well as the need for image and art in communication versus pure cognitive communication. See Leonard Sweet, *Post Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman & Holdman, 2000) 85-108,145-156, Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000)120-170, Brian McClaren *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 159-170. It goes one step further to caution that our presentations and art must be authentic and historically grounded to avoid the culpability of so many consumer advertising practices that create desire for a product that does nothing of benefit for the consumer.

[15]See Pritchard, *Willow Creek Services*, 138-141; 249-257: and Kenneson, *Selling Out* 71-83.

[16]See Phil Kenneson's analysis on this issue, *Selling Out*, 49-62. See also Pritchard's analysis of the "the Unchurched Larry Problem," *Willow Creek Services*, 268-271.

[17]See for example Thomas Oden, *Agenda for Theology: After Modernity _What*((Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) ch. 11 as one of the first to make this connection in relation to postmodernity (in his first edition),

[18]On this idea of witness see Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 105. More recently see Hauerwas' Gifford lectures, *With The Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001) ch.8; The task then is not so much to argue or contend for universal proofs, but to live truth so deeply and sufficiently that it throws alternative worlds into "epistemic crisis" and leaves open the door to those in that crisis for conversion to the Kingdom of the God of Israel and Jesus Christ. On "epistemological crisis" see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *Monist* 60 no.4 (October 1977): 453-472. It seems to me MacIntyre's notion is central to understanding evangelism in the postmodern fragmented era.

[19]This is what lies behind Craig Van Gelder's statement about missions to a postmodern society, "The building of living communities that practice wholeness and healing will constitute one of the greatest missiological challenges for the church in the twenty-first century," "Defining the Center – Finding the Boundaries," in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) ed. George Hunsberger, Craig Van Gelder. p.32. The notion that the Church is to be its own apologetic is the prominent theme of Stanley Hauerwas. See *Community of Character* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982). Also see Phil Kenneson, *Beyond Sectarianism* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1999) and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) ch.10, 18. The fact that this theme now spans the globe, both Methodist and Reformed protestant lines as well as European (Newbigin) and North American lines reveals a broad sweeping coalescence around this theological position in the church.

[20]For this critique as it applies to both missions and evangelism see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991) 488; Dallas Willard "Rethinking Evangelism: A Conversation With Dallas Willard," *Cutting Edge*(Summer, 2001)

[21]Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* 2nd ed. (Guilford, Surrey: IPS, 1995), therefore refers to the early church, how "the quality of their fellowship broke down their barriers," (p.219). He says "It is very noticeable that the home provided the most natural context for gossiping the gospel" in the early church context (p.xx). On the centrality of the house for early church evangelism see pp.250-270. Hospitality is also a central theme for George Hunter's account of Celtic Evangelism, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). Numerous other strategies around this theme have appeared including the "Alpha group movement," "servant evangelism," "friendship evangelism," and "peer to peer" evangelism.

[22]"Worship Evangelism" is the phrase first popularized by Sally Morgenthaler's book of the same phrase (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Although not postmodern in its emphasis, Morgenthaler leads us in the issues important for a postmodern evangelism.

[23]Stanley Grenz makes this point about Evangelical churches in general in *Renewing the Center*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 289-290.

[24]In other words, a convert in postmodernity, is not defined by his or her isolated decision for Christ in a guilt-ridden and/or fear driven moment of crisis. Instead, this first decision merely defines that person as a seeker beginning a journey towards initiation. The end of this beginning is the decision of the whole person to enter the death of Christ in baptism and rise again in the Spirit out of these waters to new life; existence under his Lordship in the body of Christ

[25]Newbigin makes essentially the same point for different reasons in *The Gospel for a Pluralist Society*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989) p.121. He states that the goal of missions is "the presence of a new reality" in the Spirit before the world. Newbigin argues that the apostle Paul believed his mission was to plant living vibrant communities of Christ, not save all the world's individuals. He defends this thesis by pointing to the apostle's words in Rom. 15:23 that he "no longer has any room for work in these regions." This implies for Newbigin that Paul believed the missionary task was completed through planting believing communities in every region because obviously every individual had not been presented with the gospel. According to Newbigin, Paul therefore can say he has "fully preached the gospel" in these regions even though there are still those who have not heard. This is part and parcel of Newbigin's collectivist understanding of the church as embodying the gospel as a witness to the world of a way of life made possible because of what Jesus has done. The idea of "missional communities" in a postmodern world is also an emphasis of The Vineyard movement, a major force for church planting in North America in the past fifteen years.

[26]This is the suggestion of Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999) 141-163. It is developed further in his forthcoming book *Journey to Jesus*. (Nashville: Abington Press, 2002).

The Value of Authenticity in Postmodern Evangelism

Kimberly Thacker

One of the most common Evangelical frustrations concerning reaching people with the gospel in our current postmodern culture is its rejection of absolute truth. How can we share the absolute truth and universal story of Christianity with people who do not believe that absolute truth exists and reject all forms of metanarratives? Many books and articles contain beneficial information about drawing postmoderns into church but do not really address this central question. The implied assumption is that, once people are attracted to the church, they will accept Christ through the same presentations and analogies we have used since the birth of Evangelicalism in the heart of the modern era. Others respond by positing logical arguments against relativism which, although insightful, hold little weight among postmoderns, most of whom do not give precedence to logical arguments.

Instead of insisting on acceptance of the gospel through the modern categories of truth, we will be more effective in postmodern evangelism if we address the core problem of rejection of absolute truth and metanarratives by exploring ways to present the gospel using postmodern values and to defend it according to postmodern criteria of justification. Although their rhetoric rejects absolutes, popular postmodern culture suggests that postmoderns object to the modern concept of truth more than to the entire idea of absolutes or truth. An exploration of postmodern culture yields several values which serve as criteria for the justification of beliefs and life choices and which resonate with the core gospel message. Since post-modernity is most clearly defined as the rejection of modernity, we should use postmodern values to challenge people to accept Christ as the only way to God and commit their lives to him rather than claiming that a modern conceptual framework is integral for supporting the uniqueness of the gospel. One popular postmodern value which has great potential for evangelism is the concept of authenticity.

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The Value of Authenticity in Postmodern Culture

In order to effectively use postmoderns' attraction to authenticity in evangelism, it is important to understand its meaning in postmodern culture.[1] Since authenticity carries a more subjective and relational meaning than the common modern usage of truth, it is not simply a synonym which can be substituted for the word or concept of truth in a gospel presentation. The meaning of authenticity can best be understood in reference to three categories: people, relationships, and religion.

Personal Authenticity

The individual person is a common referent of authenticity. The ability to be authentic means, in part, the freedom to choose and act upon interests, goals, beliefs and values. Even with its growing value on community, America's "first language" of individualism[2] remains constant; freedom of choice and opinion maintain centrality in the postmodern worldview.[3] Major postmodern tenets such as rejection of metanarratives and placing primary value on tolerance, pluralism, and diversity elevate authentic choice and expression of the autonomous individual because truth itself is redefined as an individual and cultural construct.[4] In some ways, the value of personal authenticity is the default of our culture which rejects the existence of objective reality or, at least, our human ability to know it. However, the value of personal authenticity has a deeper meaning than complete freedom of choice and construction of reality. An authentic person has integrity, meaning consistency in all areas of life, and honesty, meaning open and valid expression of inner feelings, failures, and needs.

Postmodern people may be morally relativistic and religiously pluralistic regarding content, but they value integrity and sincerity when people act according to their beliefs, values, and convictions.[5] Integrity involves holistic integration of all areas of one's existence, the authenticity of lives, words, and feelings which "all line up."[6] A popular article admonishes us to "be honest and open about who you really are. People who lack genuine core values rely on external factors--their looks or status--in order to feel good about themselves."[7] The author urges people to do what is "right and not just fashionable or politically correct" with "right" contextually defined as following one's own convictions rather than any external standards.[8] Authenticity defined as consistency with one's chosen beliefs and lifestyle is a prescriptive postmodern value.

"Who you really are" also stretches beyond consistency with personal choices or preferences to incorporate honesty in self-

portrayal. Honesty involves exploring the depths of self and being realistic about life experiences. Contrary to the complaint that postmoderns are only interested in image and superficiality,[9] authenticity involves depth beyond surface images and the consumer identity fostered by materialistic society.[10] Honesty includes admitting failures and weaknesses, a quality highly stressed in advice for evangelism and leadership in the postmodern era.[11] Admitting failure is a hallmark of an authentic presentation of self because most image façades stem from insecurity and desire to hide weaknesses.

Authenticity in Community and Relationships

Postmodern people are known for desiring community,[12] and authenticity is an important trait of those communities. In part, this is a manifestation of the value on personal authenticity because communities and relationships should be settings for developing and expressing one's identity. Postmodern people understand that "the human self is in some sense constituted by social relationships."[13] The relational ties of culture, family, peer groups, and chosen communities of belonging all contribute to one's authentic identity and must be included in its expression. Many communities may be intentionally chosen to reflect one's identity, beliefs, and interests.[14]

Furthermore, relationships ought to be places where one can act authentically and be accepted for who one is. A Coupland character illustrates this valued quality in his dating relationship: "Nobody's ever spoken to me before. I mean, not to *me*. I was always just a soul to be harvested or a human unit. But with Dusty I'm me, and I don't have to fake normality."[15] Authentic relationships and communities value and encourage authentic self-expression. Openness and honesty are primary tenets. Another Coupland character explains his attempt to rebuild solid and trusting "good" relationships: "I have made a vow with myself to tell the truth as best I can to the people who matter to me."[16] Mutual vulnerability and sharing affirms human value through accepting and encouraging authentic expression and exploration.

Therefore, relationships and communities are authentic when members are reaching beyond themselves in genuine commitment to and care for others. Hahn and Verhaagen explain "Beneath the cynical facade and the no-commitment rhetoric [of GenX] is a desperate hunger for authenticity and relationships that last beyond mutual gratification and convenience."[17] The desire to love and be loved in honest, accepting, and trusting relationships is always a meaningful aspect of human existence and a powerful point of connection for sharing the gospel.

Additionally, communities authentically determine truth and values both because this is realistic and because truth and values ought to serve the community which creates them. Authors note that community is often the postmodern locus of truth.[18] Rorty explains that people make their life goal either relationship to a nonhuman objective reality, or the solidarity of contribution to a community, but only the second focuses on life matters of reality and importance.[19]

Authentic Religion

Unsurprisingly, authentic religion or spirituality has the capability for discovery and fulfillment of the self in its unique individual identity.[20] Religious practices and beliefs should be chosen and constructed based on personal meaning and significance.[21] It is personal meaning, not content, which makes spiritual practices authentic. The element of choice is also integral. Tomlinson explains: "Truth is what you find out for yourself, not what someone else imposes on you."[22]

However, mixed in with the rhetoric of personal spiritual quests, self-fulfillment, and choice of religious options is a genuine desire for authentic connection with the divine. Morgenthaler stresses throughout her book that people today want real worship which provides a genuine connection with and experience of God.[23] This authentic connection is best accomplished through the deep and innermost feelings of the self[24] because this is the location of true identity. The popularity of the term "spirituality" over "religion" is illustrative. Miller elaborates: "Religion is seen as institutional and man-made; thus defined, it is of marginal interest to many people. Spirituality represents individual attempts to connect with the larger mysteries of the universe."[25]

Another important component of religious authenticity is the plausibility of a religious system regarding life experiences. Richardson explains: "People aren't looking for absolutes or universal truth. People today are looking for truth that is real, truth that resonates with their lives, their experiences and the experiences of their community."[26] Long explains that Xers ask "Is it real?" not "Is it true?"[27] Essentially, these are both questions of justification concerning the absolute status of beliefs. The difference is that postmodern people use life experiences rather than logic to judge. Authentic religious explanations will holistically incorporate many dimensions of human knowing and experience.[28] They will not attempt to unrealistically offer simple answers to complex and

difficult life situations and questions, such as those surrounding the existence of evil and suffering.[29]

A religious system is also deemed authentic if it has meaningful effects in a person's life and in the world. Several authors comment that instrumentality and pragmatism are important qualities of faith and spirituality for postmoderns.[30] Religion ought to "work" for people. The radical postmodern philosopher Feyerabend illustrates this tendency by objecting to conceptual and abstract theorizing which only ask how ideas are related to one another rather than how they are related to human existence.[31] On a popular level, Richardson presents a series of questions illustrating postmodern views concerning religion:

> Does your belief change lives? Does prayer really make a difference? Do you live a better or a happier life? Does your religion work? Does it help you with your pain? If it works for you, why should it work for me? *What does it matter what you believe as long as it works and helps you?*...If a religion works and feels real to a person, then it is true for that person.[32]

It is life results which demonstrate the authenticity, value, or truth of a religion. Content only matters in terms of its results for people's lives and actions.

However, there *are* values concerning what these results should be. For example, a *McCall's* article suggests:

> Reassess your beliefs. Are you living by secondhand values? At some point each of us needs to review the ideas we inherited from our parents, peers and society. Write down the notions you grew up with. Do they promote love, growth and self-acceptance? If not, how can you rewrite them?[33]

Both individual-focused self-acceptance and community-focused love are criteria for judging the authenticity of beliefs. Postmodern people also find religions authentic when they demonstrate concern for social and environmental issues through concrete acts of service.[34] Again, we see that the value of authenticity is not merely self-focused or completely radically relativistic.

Using the Value of Authenticity in Evangelism

The postmodern justification of the truth and reality of beliefs according to their authenticity demonstrated through individuals and relationships necessitates attention to the witness of our lives and communities. This is not a new idea, of course. The heart of Christian conversion and commitment is total life transformation as we are freed from sin and change allegiance from ourselves to Christ. Many postmodern people will encounter Christ more completely in our lives than through any sort of verbal explanation. However, since the changes in our lives are made possible by the historical event of Christ's death and resurrection, it is necessary at some point to explain the core gospel message as the reason and power for our transformation. Postmodern people may be attracted to the pragmatic effects of Christianity for their lives and decide to adopt Christian precepts or worship in Christian communities, but still view Christianity as one valid spiritual choice among many or as the most authentic spiritual path for them personally. Instead of centering their lives around Christ, their own choices and needs maintain primary authority. We should not abandon the criterion of authenticity because it has served its purpose in creating interest, but instead should further utilize it in helping people realize that commitment to Christ is the one true way to live and relate to God. The value of authenticity yields many starting points and concepts for explaining the core gospel message of the cross enabling reconciliation with God and transformation of the human condition of sin, and our need to respond by surrendering our lives to Christ.

We will explore three ideas, corresponding to the three sections above, for challenging people with the absolute claims of the gospel using the postmodern value of authenticity. The overall apologetic method is inductive or ad hoc rather than deductive. Instead of using broad general statements and demonstrating the gospel message through logical steps, we begin with areas of common agreement and present the Christian solution, building to an explanation of the gospel.[35] Demonstrating God's existence or Jesus' identity as the Son of God is often an indirect focus. According to postmodern criteria of justification, by demonstrating the effects of what Jesus can do in our lives and relationships, especially if we can successfully show that these things cannot be done in any other way, by anyone else, or through any other religion, we *are* demonstrating the existence of God and that Jesus is the Son of God. It is a given throughout that we must strive with our lives and communities to reflect the truths we teach in order to validate our explanations.

Christ Enabling Personal Authenticity

The postmodern insistence on honesty in admitting weaknesses and wrongdoing as integral to personal authenticity is a bridge for discussing the problem of sin and sharing the good news of Jesus as savior. Hahn and Verhaagen illustrate:

> We [postmoderns] tend to have realistic expectations for ourselves and for others. We know that people are fallible and have their limits. We know that it is as easy for us to fail someone as it is for us to be failed.[36]

The postmodern identification of failure as a constant part of human existence implies that sin is a universal reality which no one can overcome. Humanity is in a fallen state and part of being authentic is admitting our own sins.

That "sin" is not a popular term in today's culture does not lessen people's recognition of it. Kraft suggests assisting people in dealing with their own ideals, which they know that they fail to achieve, before challenging them with new ideals based on God's standards.[37] Rather than dwelling on controversial sin issues in our culture, we can ask people if they have ever violated their own integrity, personal values, or relational ideals. Concurrently, we can demonstrate that many of their core values correspond with God's desires for their lives.

Recognizing the need for salvation through Christ requires more than simply acknowledging that sin is part of human existence. We also must admit our human inability to overcome sin on our own power even though we do desire to change. Postmodern people value the results of deep self-exploration. Introspection, especially regarding areas of pain and failure, can lead people to recognize their inability to follow their own standards of morality and act in a consistently loving manner in their relationships. For example, Coupland's protagonist in *Life After God* concludes a journey of self-reflection by admitting:

> My secret is that I need God - that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.[38]

There is almost no need to draw the parallel to Paul's admission, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:19, 24). Admitting weakness and failure is a crucial step in Christian conversion because it is necessary both for acknowledging the need for a Savior and for submission to Christ as Lord.

Defining sin as addiction, is also helpful. Addictive behavior is an example of sin binding and controlling us until we cannot free ourselves. Authentic self-exploration leads to the realization that our choices are not as free as we think they are and we cannot always control our anger, jealousy, and bitterness.

We can discuss issues of wrongdoing with postmodern people through sharing our own failures and then can present the forgiveness and transformation we have experienced in Christ. Relevant points of emphasis include Christ breaking the power of sin, Christ bringing inner healing and enabling transformation, and the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness. From another angle, we can begin by naming lack of authenticity and the resulting alienation from self and others as a central human problem. Building from agreement concerning this problem, we can explain that true authenticity is only possible through Christ and integrally related to admitting sin and accepting forgiveness.

We can stress the uniqueness of the gospel by demonstrating that the solutions offered by popular postmodern culture do not fully enable us to be authentic because they do not adequately deal with the issue of sin. Postmodern culture and New Age religious options tend to side-step issues of sin and evil[39] because these are untenable within a relativistic framework and incompatible with the belief that all people are basically good. Pop psychology often identifies wrongdoing with victimhood or lack of communication, both of which minimize personal responsibility. Improvement and healing are found through absolving oneself of blame. Social convention similarly teaches us to explain away hurtful actions by blaming external circumstances, misunderstanding, or emotions which get the better of us. If we do admit wrong, the other person is compelled to dismiss the pain in order for the relationship to continue. "It's OK, it doesn't matter" is the proper cultural response to "I'm sorry." The problem is that it does matter.

Minimizing sin is the way our culture teaches us to maintain positive self-esteem and relationships. This minimization forces people to portray themselves inauthentically by often ignoring the selfish motivations contributing to harmful actions and the depth of pain and guilt caused by their own sins and the sins of others. There is little improvement or healing because no responsibility is taken for the root of the problem of selfishness. The Christian message of forgiveness allows for the acknowledgment of sin and the pain it causes *and* a way to move forward. As Miller exemplifies in comments on feelings reported during worship: "the potential for

joy...[because] Jesus offers unconditional love and acceptance - allowed them to acknowledge the underside of their lives, the ugliness that they usually attempted to hide from view."[40] We cannot deny our sin, because in so doing we keep it hidden inside ourselves, but must bring it into the light where Christ can take it from us.

It is Christ who enables us to be truly authentic because we are able to admit our sins and the pain we carry from sins committed against us knowing there is forgiveness and help. Morgenthaler illustrates this quality in authentic worship which "enables people to be honest about who they are and offers them Christ, the power for becoming who God wants them to be."[41] We do not have to pretend with Jesus because he died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). In Christ, we no longer have to create façades for others, and often for ourselves, to hide our sins and weaknesses because forgiveness offers us a fresh start. Christ also provides healing for genuine issues of victimization which prevent reaching out in love and trust to others. Christ frees us to authentically be ourselves, both because we can be honest about our sins, weaknesses, and failures and because we are no longer bound by sin. We are free to pursue the heart of our authentic identity by being who God created us to be.

Authentic Community Formed by Christ

We can affirm that authentic expression of humanity is found in community, as postmodern people desire, and explain how the forgiveness and love given in Christ brings community to its full potential. Since postmodern people value relationships, relational sin is a good starting point for sharing the truth of the gospel. It is difficult to deny that one has hurt someone one loves, failed to be there for them at some important point, or put one's own desires first a good deal of the time. We can describe the essence of sin as the disruption of the community that God desires for us in fellowship with himself, each other, and all creation.[42] Without forgiveness, either relationships break apart when there is too much pain or the pain is minimizede can present Christ as the one who makes forgiveness possible and helps transform us so we can have reconciliation in our relationships, as well as with God, and move beyond our selfish desires to authentic and deep love for others.

A related starting point is a discussion of the relational components of authentic human identity. Not only can we connect Christian community to postmodern values of authenticity for relationships and community, but also to the ultimate manifestation

of individual authentic identity. Bellah's team recognizes this lack in our highly individualistic American society:

> There are truths we do not see when we adopt the language of radical individualism. We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. We never get to the bottom of our selves on our own.[43]

The realization that identity and desire for meaning are fulfilled only through giving and caring relationships with others paves the way for a discussion of sin and forgiveness.

This realization sets the stage for recognition of selfishness as a root cause of sin, an admission which is lacking in popular postmodern options. Wilkinson comments that the deep flaw of neo-pagan thought is "the tendency for the circle of the self to be expanded in such a way as to threaten the circles of wholeness and relationship."[44] American individualism and postmodern relativistic self-chosen morality can be exposed as ultimately encouraging selfishness and threatening relationships. Instead, mutual love and responsibility form the basis for our very identity as well as our happiness.

People crave the authentic expression which is only possible within loving community. Morgenthaler discusses an "almost insatiable craving" for vulnerability and authenticity, especially involving God and church, even when fear makes these needs unspoken.[45] Christian community should enable authentic identity through open and honest sharing in an atmosphere of forgiveness, but also move beyond self-expression to affirm core identity as beings in relationship. Part of our longing for vulnerability is our longing to understand and express who we really are through loving relationships with others.

The gospel answer is that we are created for community. Deciding to follow Christ is not a commitment to a position or an individual spiritual path, but entry into a way of life and restoration of our authentic identity through relationships with others. Long reminds us that "Jesus' mission was to re-create us in community with God and with each other."[46] The community to which we are called maximizes the postmodern ideal of genuine mutual love and care. Christ enables authentic community because we can be honest with one another, admitting our sins because we know we are all sinners in need of forgiveness. Following the example of Christ and through his power, we can continually improve in forgiving and loving one another.

Christ transforms our natures so that we are free to move from self-focus to genuine self-giving love for others which stems

from our love for God and his love for us. Bonhoeffer writes that Christian community is a spiritual reality and differs from all other communities because it is created by the Holy Spirit who puts Jesus Christ into our hearts.[47] He further explains that, whereas human love is for the sake of self and so seeks to bind the other, producing "human subjection, dependence, [and] constraint," spiritual love loves the other for the sake of Christ and creates freedom in fruits from the Spirit.[48] This love also should expand outward to the wider neighborhood and community.[49] Grenz describes the church as "a covenanting people" who are not an end in themselves but are related to God's larger intention.[50]

In summary, we can present the human problem of sin as disruption of community with God and others, which also damages our identity, and point to the reconciliation made possible through Christ's offer of forgiveness. In response to postmodern loneliness and insecurity, Christianity offers a secure relational identity as a child of God and a family in Christ which will remain for eternity. The promise of eternal life is a promise of authentic community in which we will be cleansed from all selfishness and sin to enjoy eternal, intimate, and transparent relationship with God and other believers.

An Authentic Relationship with God

Authentic religion from a postmodern perspective includes genuine connection with the divine. However, postmodern people are reluctant to accept any sort of absolute claims about God, endangering both true encounter with God's character and authentic commitment of one's whole life. Lack of commitment is a common feature of our pluralistic culture. Walter Truett Anderson describes postmodern patterns: "Most of us now are not so much believers as possessors of beliefs. Conversion comes easy and often. The seeker after religious faith tries on not one religion, but any number of them."[51] The emphasis is on the possessor rather than the content of the beliefs. The central postmodern meaning of authentic commitment is one's integrity to one's own values and beliefs rather than to any external deity, community, or belief system. External factors certainly affect an individual's choices, but their primary perceived value lies not in their content but in their identity *as the individual's choices*.

However, this postmodern value on integrity can still lead to the possibility of productive discussion concerning authentic commitment to Christ. A commitment which is centered on self most likely has benefits for the individual and self-exploration as its goal rather than love for God. Willimon reminds: "Authenticity is more

than a matter of being who I am; it's a matter of being who God calls me to be."[52] The issue is one of allegiance. An authentic commitment to Christ must truly put Christ first, submitting in all things, and allow for transformation even of the innermost parts of our identity. We do not lose our identity in this transformation because our authentic identity is rooted in our creation in God's image.

One of the ways we can lead people beyond a self-focused commitment is to present authentic commitment as a component of relationships rather than adherence to a set of beliefs or values. Since postmodern people do not believe in the absolute truth of propositions and beliefs, it is hard for them to grasp the idea of commitment to an external set of beliefs in such a way that these beliefs truly take primacy over the choice of committing to them. However, commitment to a relationship necessarily involves an external component: the other person. Postmodern people define authenticity in relationships and community as loyalty and genuine love. Relationships are authentic not so much because each individual chooses to maintain them, but because of qualities of the relationship. In this way, we move beyond a purely subjective basis for authenticity.

Bonhoeffer explains the heart of Christian faith as relationship:

> Human thought is dominated by the form of the word as idea. The idea rests in itself and is related to itself; its validity holds throughout space and time. When Christ is called the Word of God today, it is usually with this sense of the idea...The Word as address stands in contrast to all this. While it is possible for the Word as idea to remain by itself, as address it is only possible between two. Address requires response and responsibility.[53]

If Christian truth is primarily ideas or beliefs, *we* are in control as possessors of these beliefs. Instead, God's choice to primarily reveal himself in the Incarnation as a human being is indicative of the relational nature of God's truth, an understanding which resonates well with the concept of authenticity.

An authentic relationship with God pushes postmodern people to move beyond vague notions of a benign divine source to struggle with the reality of a God who is personally relating to them. Morgenthaler comments on the widespread use of the term spiritual: "Indeed, anything that makes us feel good seems to possess spiritual power."[54] If we can successfully present Christianity as a relationship with the living God rather than a set of practices and

spiritual disciplines for self-edification, we challenge people to consider the unique revelation of God.

If people grasp authentic Christian commitment primarily as a relationship, they move beyond a postmodern understanding of religious beliefs as relative and subjectively or culturally determined to an understanding of a God who exists apart from human beliefs about him. One cannot have a relationship with another who does not exist. A relationship is not possible unless the other is knowable and available. From the premise that God is knowable and available, we can deal with the pluralistic view that we cannot know absolute truth about God. We can affirm that our subjective human limitations makes this unlikely, unless God chooses to reveal himself to us through means we can understand within our humanity, namely the Incarnation of Christ. Newbigin illustrates: "The unknown god is a convenient object of belief, since its character is a matter for me to decide. It cannot challenge me or pose radical questions to me."[55] Once we bring people to a point of belief in a known God, the foundation is laid for presenting the particulars of his revelation and demands on us.

We can present the gospel message in relational terms. God cares deeply about the harm we cause to ourselves and others because he loves us and therefore sin causes pain and brokenness in our relationship with God. God became incarnate in Christ to demonstrate his love for us by entering into our world and our suffering and pain. Christ's death demonstrates how our rebellion and the pain we cause destroys our relationship with God, but instead of reacting in anger against us, he takes all of the painful results of our actions on himself. The resurrection of Christ shows that the relationship is restored if we are willing to accept forgiveness, turn from rebellion, and again enter into the relationship.

Conclusion

There are many other possibilities for using the postmodern value of authenticity to present the truth of the gospel. Some examples are: the authenticity of Jesus' life demonstrating the validity of his claims; the necessity of authentic humanity and authentic divinity for a mediator between people and God; authentic identity as children of God; the authenticity of Christian commitment as spiritual journey; the authenticity of the Christian explanation for suffering and offer of hope in its midst; and the authentic standard of common human experience as a basis for truth claims. There are many possible ways for contextualizing the gospel message in the culture of popular postmodernism. This provides options for tailoring our evangelistic points of contact to the unique needs, questions, and life circumstances of each individual.

As in all mission situations, the value of authenticity should enhance our own understanding of Christian identity as well as providing a conceptual framework for evangelism. Rather than an intellectual acknowledgment of the logical truth of a set of propositions, the relational quality of authenticity rightly focuses our understanding of Christian conversion primarily as restoration to a dynamic relationship with God which transforms all aspects of our lives. Stressing life transformation and commitment in the language and concepts we use to present the gospel helps keep life change central. The challenges of postmodern people can help restore us to the biblical focus of living as lights in a dark world and demonstrating the love Christ has for humanity through our love, and his power to change lives through our own transformation.

NOTES

[1]When I refer to postmodern culture, I am not only referring to Generation X. Much postmodern research focuses on Gen X, but is also indicative of the greater culture. In exploring the meaning of authenticity, I try to use research both concerning Gen X and the Boomers. Postmodernism has greatly affected both of these generations and also has effects on older generations because of its pervasiveness in our culture. Basically, I am using postmodernism to refer to our current popular culture, although probably with more application for the younger generations.

[2]Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), viii, 20; development 142-63.

[3]Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen, *Reckless Hope: Understanding and Reaching Baby Busters*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 39.

[4]Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990), x-xi, 7-8; Tim Celek and Dieter Zander,

Inside the Soul of a New Generation, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 50; Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 24; Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 42-3.

[5]Hahn and Verhaagen, 47; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 15.

[6]Rick Richardson, *Evangelism outside the Box*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 46.

[7]Denis Waitley, "How to be True to Yourself," *Reader's Digest*, Aug. 1999, 198.

[8]*Ibid.*, 199.

[9]Gibbs, 24; David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56; Philip Sampson, "The Rise of Postmodernity," in *Faith and Modernity*, ed. Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel, and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1994), 39; Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 84-5.

[10]Celek and Zander, 64; Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs*, (Regan Books/Harper Collins, New York, 1995), 60; Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 58, 128, 158.

[11]Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 59, 162; Celek and Zander, 101-2, 144; Kevin Graham Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 195; Gibbs, 130; Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 153; Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 14, 68, 124; Richardson, 48.

[12]Celek and Zander, 76, 84-5; Ford, 115-16; Hahn and Verhaagen, 120-1; Long, 52, 61, 76, 138; Richardson, 86-7; Veith, 146.

[13]Stanley J. Grenz, "Belonging to God: The Quest for a Communal Spirituality in the Postmodern World," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 44.

[14]Bellah et al. discuss the concept of "lifestyle enclaves" in which people choose their communities according to common beliefs or interests. They contrast this to real community which would have more diversity (71-5). Roof also discusses the commonality of intentionally chosen communities which are generally chosen because of shared characteristics or purposes between the individual and the group (161-3).

[15]Coupland, *Microserfs*, 241.

[16]Douglas Coupland, *Shampoo Planet*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), 276.

[17]Hahn and Verhaagen, 120; similar observation in Beaudoin, 140-1; Celek and Zander 58; Miller, 184.

[18]Grenz, *Primer*, 8; Long, 70-1; Sampson, 37.

[19]Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21-4, 33, 45.

[20]Grenz, *Belonging*, 43; Roof, 157-9.

[21]Barbara Bartocci, "Simple Ways to Feed Your Spirit," *McCall's*, November 1999, 84; John Drane, *What Is the New Age Still Saying to the Church?*, (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999), 62-3; Roof, 32, 75; Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical*, (London: Triangle, 1995), 78.

[22]Tomlinson, 78; similar observations in Celek and Zander, 50; Richardson, 100.

[23]Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 23-5, 57-60, 65-7, 78, 84, 92-3, 98-9, 138-9.

[24]Roof, 33-4, 57. Interestingly, "spirituality" places the emphasis on the individual as the best arbiter of spiritual expression which resonates with the inner self in contrast to "religion" which emphasizes the tradition or system as the best arbiter of spiritual expression; neither term places the emphasis on God even though both claim to connect with God.

[25]Miller, 182.

[26]Richardson, 46.

[27]Long, 210.

[28]Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason*, (New York: Verso, 1987), 259; Grenz, *Primer*, 14; Paul Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999), 53, 56; Richardson, 46; Tomlinson, 140.

[29]Beaudoin, 118-20, 140-2; Ford, 38, 205; Hahn and Verhaagen, 29; Tomlinson, 102.

[30]Ford, 139, Drane, 55, Roof, 83.

[31]Feyerabend, 83.

[32]Richardson, 39-40 (italics mine).

[33] Bartocci, 86.

[34]Ford, 184; Gibbs, 130; Rick Gosnell, "Proclamation and the Postmodernist," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, ed. David S. Dockery, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 380; Long, 46, 202.

[35]Discussion of these methods in Gosnell, 378-80, William Werpehowski, "Ad Hoc Apologetics," in *Journal of Religion* 66, (July 1986), 286-8.

[36]Hahn and Verhaagen, 29.

[37]Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, (Maryknoll, Orbis: 1979), 245-53.

[38]Douglas Coupland, *Life After God*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 359.

[39]Drane, 149; Loren Wilkinson, "Circles and the Cross: Reflections on Neo-paganism, Postmodernity, and Celtic Christianity," in *Crux* 32, no. 4, (Dec. 1996), 21.

[40]Miller, 89.

[41]Morgenthaler, 117.

[42]Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 242-4.

[43]Bellah et al., 84.

[44]Wilkinson, 21.

[45]Morgenthaler, 110-11.

[46]Long, 89.

[47]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1954), 31.

[48]*Ibid.*, 34, 37.

[49]Newbigin, 229.

[50]Grenz, *Theology*, 614.
[51]W. T. Anderson, 9.
[52]William H. Willimon, "How 'Authentic' Should I Be?: Be True to My Calling," in *Leadership* 19, (Winter 1998): 58-62, 62.
[53] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1960), 50.
[54]Morgenthaler, 61.
[55]Newbigin, 21.

Unfinished Evangelism: Christian Believer and *Alpha* as Forms of Catechetical Training for the Ancient-Future Church

Andrew D. Kinsey

> "It is precisely in Western societies, those which increasingly no longer understand themselves as being specifically Christian, that the explicit catechetical process of learning the faith again becomes an urgent aspect of church life, one the theological task of communication must now address in a fashion quite similar to that in the early church itself."[1]

The oft-quoted refrain that the cultural landscape has changed in the West is prescient. Much has been written about the "turn" to a postmodern and post-Christendom context.[2] Churches across the theological spectrum have put forth a host of strategies to reach out to un-churched, de-churched, semi-churched persons. The list of tactics and programs have become endless. Not taking for granted that persons understand the basic contours of the Christian faith, many mainline, evangelical, and charismatic churches have begun new and innovative ways to ground persons in the basics of doctrine. The consequences for evangelism are many.

In this essay, I will argue that the rise of programs like Christian Believer and *The Alpha Course* reflects that the church in the West has entered "a period of intense but uncoordinated experimentation in evangelism and catechesis."[3] The shift to a post-Christendom context means that churches can no longer assume people know the story of salvation. The language of faith may be dim or altogether absent. Christian Believer and *Alpha* represent attempts, albeit differently designed, to ground persons in the basic themes and practices of the faith in this new cultural situation.

Throughout this essay, I will point out several items with respect to the ministry of evangelism: first, the church in the West has entered a new phase in history. The surrounding culture cannot be expected to support the claims of the gospel. The role of the

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ecclesia to shape believers now takes on new importance. The church has moved, in the words of Loren Mead, into an apostolic mode of mission and ministry.[4]

Second, the ministry of evangelism in this new era remains incomplete without some form of catechetical training. The models of proclamation and witness, while vital to evangelism, also need the ongoing work of catechesis in the life of the church to establish persons in faith and discipleship.[5] A sanctification gap opens up without some kind of catechumenate.[6] This assumes that evangelism is more than preaching or faith-sharing: evangelism is that unique praxis of the church which focuses on the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of persons through the proclamation of God's Word and the continual schooling of persons in the practices and doctrines of the church.[7] Such a definition points to the holistic nature of evangelism on the one hand, while drawing the important connection to faithful discipleship on the other. A symbiotic relationship exists between evangelism and catechesis; they cannot be rent asunder.[8]

Third, Christian Believer and *Alpha* represent attempts in this new cultural context to ground persons in the basic themes and doctrines of the church. Both Believer and *Alpha*, while representing ancient forms of catechesis, reflect two different approaches to the ministry of catechesis -- e.g., Believer, in grounding persons in the classical doctrines of the church, and *Alpha*, in inviting persons new to the faith to make a commitment to Christ. I will give a brief overview of these programs and then raise questions regarding their significance for evangelism.[9]

Christian Believer

The primary purpose of the Christian Believer program is "to make available to people the substance of the Christian faith that the church has confessed as a way of connecting to God and living faithfully."[10] This 30 week study takes a critical look at the classical doctrines of the church and presents the material in a way which helps persons move from "informed believing" to "committed discipleship."[11] Christian Believer brings to light the historical dimensions of Christian doctrine and emphasizes the relationship of worship and belief, of prayer and study, to daily life. The goal of Believer is to equip the community of faith in sharing the gospel with the world, especially the next generation.[12]

What makes Christian Believer unique is that it studies those doctrines which have provided the consensus to Christian teaching over time. Like the building blocks of a home, these doctrines have provided the foundation for learning what the church has taught

throughout its history; they supply the boundaries or "foul lines" to understanding what is "in" and what is "out" of accepted Christian teaching.[13] No apologies are given for stating that this is what is at stake in believing the gospel. Instead, the focus is on the substance of the Christian faith and the connection between believing and living. There is no backing away from the difficulty of the material.

From the beginning, Christian Believer incorporates the language of faith on different levels. Through word and symbol, persons in Believer work to understand the vocabulary of faith as a way to probe the mystery of the gospel. Persons learn through songs and prayer the words and concepts of the faith. The language is biblical, but it also draws heavily on the ancient creeds of the church. Christian Believer invites persons to learn this unique language and to understand that the language of faith simply cannot be reduced to secular lingo.

But what are the effects of Christian Believer? Here, I will not go into an exhaustive account of the program; that is beyond the scope of this essay. However, I do want to show how the various components of Believer work together to form persons into committed followers of Christ as an aspect of catechetical instruction. That is, I would like to show how, in many respects, Christian Believer functions to root the gospel in the lives of those who believe (Eph. 3:17).

In the late 80's, the Disciple Bible Study program hit United Methodist and other mainline churches with tremendous applause and enthusiasm.[14] Pioneered by Bishop Richard Wilke of the Arkansas Area of the United Methodist Church, this highly structured Bible study was created to challenge laity and clergy to read the scripture daily and to prepare for a two-and-half hour group discussion weekly with ten to twelve other persons. The goal was to make disciples through Bible study.[15] Video segments of persons from the fields of history, theology, and Bible gave insight into the material. In addition, prayer, singing, Psalm-reading, and Holy Communion were also integrated as ways of practicing the means of grace; a Study Manual helped guide persons through the questions of discipleship.

Christian Believer offers a similar pattern to the study of doctrine. Each week persons prepare by reading scripture and by studying the historical developments of Christian teaching. The Study Manual, written by Ellsworth Kalas, provides guidance in this area and a *Book of Readings* gives students the opportunity to read what others have said about a particular doctrine throughout the history of the church.[16] Prayers, hymns, and songs are also utilized as a way to learn the language and symbols of faith. A video

segment led by a noted scholar or teacher also highlights the major aspects of the doctrine in question.

On a daily basis, persons in Christian Believer are encouraged to keep up with the readings and to comprehend the substance of the gospel. It is here that Believer asks the hard questions of faith. Not only does the Study Manual and the Teacher's Manual lead persons into asking difficult questions. The whole ethos of the program is one of faith seeking understanding.[17] Christian Believer assumes that "participants are already followers of Jesus and that they come to the study to understand the faith they already have."[18] To be sure, it is geared toward persons from a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds; it also understands that they will come with a mix of beliefs. In fact, it understands that some people may be new to the faith and to the church. Whatever the continuum, Believer challenges persons to ask the question which remains unspoken but present throughout the study: Who gets to say what Christians believe?[19]

The Alpha Course

The primary purpose of *The Alpha Course* is to introduce people to the Christian faith. In 1976, Charles Marnham, an Anglican clergyman at Holy Trinity Church Brompton in London, designed a course to present basic principles of the Christian faith to new Christians. Marnham had the desire to reach persons with the gospel through relaxed and informal settings. Persons gathered in his living room to share a light meal, pray, and discuss matters of faith.[20]

In the early 1990s, Nicky Gumbel, an Oxford-educated lawyer once-atheist-turned- minister, began teaching the course. During that time, he made a startling discovery: it turned out that in his first small group ten out of thirteen persons were not committed Christians at all but were persons merely curious about the faith. Questions were asked throughout the study about suffering, other religions, and Christian doctrine. Nothing was mentioned about making a commitment to Christ.[21]

After a stormy beginning, Gumbel took time to rewrite the course. He changed the content and structure of the material to present the fundamental issues of faith in ways that would be relevant to unchurched persons. It was during this time that he organized the course into a 10-week format. Participants would come to share a meal, listen to a scripture-based talk on the basic concepts of faith, and discuss openly these and other issues in a small group setting. The whole thrust of the program would be to create a judgment-free environment where persons would feel

comfortable asking questions and exchanging ideas. No question was considered out-of-bounds. An intentional effort was made not to pressure people to participate or commit. Rather, persons were encouraged to ask questions throughout the course.[22]

The primary aim of *The Alpha Course*, then, was to introduce unchurched persons to the basic beliefs of the Christian faith and to move them into making, if they had not done so, a commitment to Christ. *Alpha* worked to accomplish this by creating a safe place to ask questions and to discover what God may be calling persons to do. In a 10 week period, the task of drawing persons into an intellectual and experiential encounter with the faith was foremost.[23]

Because *The Alpha Course* is focused on reaching out to unchurched persons, the basic parts of the course are structured in a certain way. Important is the fellowship meal where people can share openly without getting into the weighty matters of religion.[24] Persons are encouraged to get to know each other. As Nicky Gumbel has stated, this step is key as it sets the tone for the discussion to follow.[25]

It is the interaction that takes place following the meal that gives *Alpha* its distinctive flavor. The focus turns to some of the basic questions of faith: Who Is Jesus?, Why Did Jesus Die?, Why and How Should I Read the Bible?, Why and How Do I Pray?, Why and How Should I Tell Others?, Does God Heal Today?, How Can I Overcome Evil?, What Shall I Do With My Life?, Is Christianity Boring, Untrue, and Irrelevant? Each lesson focuses on a question and walks persons through the material.[26] A forty to fifty minute video lecture highlights the major components of the study. In a light and humorous way, Gumbel shares how the topic of discussion is relevant to the concerns of the day. There is a great deal of effort in making the material accessible to those who have not been involved in the church. Persons also receive a small Note-Taking Manual and the book *Questions of Faith*, where they can write and answer questions about the lesson.[27]

These questions constitute the overall slant of the course. However, one of the key characteristics of *The Alpha Course* is the emphasis it places on the Holy Spirit. Four lessons are designed to help persons understand the Spirit and to allow the Spirit to touch their lives: How does God Guide Us?, Who Is the Holy Spirit?, What Does the Holy Spirit Do?, and How Can I Be Filled With the Spirit? These lessons can be done in a retreat setting or over a long weekend.[28] Persons in the group are strongly encouraged to attend. What is significant is that persons are prepared in advance to come and share what they have learned throughout the course and what

they are planning to do with the rest of their lives. Here, if a person has not done so, a commitment to Christ can be made.

In short, *The Alpha Course* is best understood as evangelism through the local church which seeks to involve the whole person. There is a concerted effort to combine the classical aspects of evangelism and to practice evangelism in a way that allows persons to receive the love of God's Spirit through: a) the word, or the doctrines of the church, b) the holistic, or the lifestyle of the believer, and c) the power, or the signs and wonders of the Holy Spirit.[29]

Initial Observation

After delineating the basic contours of Believer and *Alpha*, it is important to affirm the contributions these programs make to the ministry of evangelism. As I have argued, they both represent new forms of an ancient practice in a new era: catechesis. However, with respect to evangelism, they are geared toward two different audiences and have two different stated purposes: Christian Believer seeks to build up the faith of those who are already following Jesus, *The Alpha Course* seeks to reach out to persons who do not know God or who have not made a commitment to Christ. We are comparing apples and oranges. This is not to say that unchurched persons cannot participate in Believer, or that committed disciples cannot take *Alpha*. Rather, in terms of the ministry of evangelism in the local church, these two forms of catechesis are geared toward different groups. What makes them distinctive is their timing on the post-Christendom landscape.[30]

Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this essay is not to engage in a full scale comparative study of Christian Believer and *Alpha*; the purpose is to show how both programs represent ancient forms of catechetical training in a new era of experimentation. It is also to expose the inherent limitations of each approach with respect to the practice of evangelism. Such considerations are not meant to detract from the unique mission each program offers to the church universal. Instead, it is to point out that there are basic assumptions undergirding approaches to evangelism and catechesis.

At the risk of over-simplifying, I would like to offer my own pastoral assessment of Christian Believer and *Alpha*: Christian Believer approaches the task of catechetical training from a non-apologetical standpoint--"Doctrine is what the church has affirmed and agreed to teach."[31] "When it comes to doctrine, we live with

mystery...the tendency will be to speculate, and a lot of time can be used discussing questions that can't be answered."[32] Yes, the material is difficult, but so is discipleship. Persons are called to pass on the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). On the other hand, *Alpha* seeks to show what is understandable about the faith to those who are seeking. In many ways, it is a form of catechesis for new pilgrims. To be sure, "We cannot change our doctrine to suit passing fashions. But the way in which we worship and the way in which we communicate the gospel must resonate with modern men and women."[33] The task is to reach people with the gospel. The point is to make the gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to contemporary seekers.

The methodological issues are clear: the purpose of Believer is to ground persons in the classical doctrines of the church; the purpose of *Alpha* is to introduce people to Christ. Both use an ancient form of learning (i.e., catechesis) to accomplish their respective tasks. Both ask difficult questions. Both, however, diverge with respect to the way the gospel is presented. And yet, both raise questions for the work of evangelism: how are form and content related? Can form change content? If so, how? What is normative for discipleship? What is the role of the pastor?

Pastoral Considerations

The emergence of Christian Believer and *Alpha* has meant that the role of the pastor as teacher comes to the surface. In this new era of ministry, pastors must recover the art of teaching the basic themes and doctrines of holy living. Much has been written about the importance of understanding the pastor as teacher.[34] Christian Believer and *Alpha* now put the spotlight on teaching again: pastors are called to become "reflective practitioners."[35] As a vital component of evangelism, theological reflection is placed at the top of the church's agenda. The church has a stake in passing on the content of the gospel. Questions which explore the mystery of God's incarnate love in Christ guide the process. Participants are transformed by the renewal of their minds (Rom. 12:2).

At the pastoral level, then, with respect to Christian Believer, there are no apologies for the level of difficulty of the material. The nature of the work is to understand how the doctrines of the church have provided the basis for faithful living throughout the church's history. There is no "dumbing down" of the faith. Instead, there is the recognition that the mystery of faith moves believers to a new level of understanding.

The Alpha Course, however, takes a different turn. The main goal of *Alpha* is to make the faith accessible to seekers. It also

assists persons in brushing up on the basics of the gospel. In this way, it helps people move toward making a commitment to Christ regardless of how long they may have been in the church. In other words, there is a concerted effort to move people toward a more holistic account of evangelism as faith-sharing, helping others, and growing in grace. *Alpha* remains true to a trinitarian understanding of the gospel.[36]

This is why the role of the pastor as teacher in *Alpha* remains important: first, the pastor works to ground persons in the practices and themes of holy living; throughout the class, the focus is on teaching the basics of the Christian faith; and second, the key to *Alpha* over the long haul is training others so that may in turn lead the class; for *Alpha* to become rooted in the life of the church, the pastor needs to work to equip others so that they may provide space necessary to share the gospel. Though *Alpha* is adaptable to a number of settings, the whole thrust of this ministry is to involve persons in the practice of hospitality and the art of faith-sharing. This process is important as people move toward making a commitment to Christ. Other aspects of the Christian journey will come later.[37]

Theological Considerations

But there are also theological considerations to keep in mind. Here, I raise a few critical insights into the nature of both Christian Believer and *Alpha* as they pertain to the ministry of evangelism.

First, the implementation of Christian Believer and *Alpha* has raised theological questions regarding the tension between remaining faithful to the gospel and becoming relevant to the culture. The question of what is normative to the Christian life emerges. The Christian Believer course makes no apologies for stating the church's faith. It is faith seeking understanding. The focus of *Alpha*, however, is geared toward making the faith understandable to persons through persuasion in a comfortable setting. Reaching out to those who are new to the faith is what is vital. The critical factor is making a faith-commitment to Christ.

But in seeking to make the faith relevant to the wider culture is there also not the danger in *Alpha* of allowing the needs of others to set the agenda? Does not the assumption that Christianity is "boring, irrelevant, or untrue" indicate an apologetical shift where the church argues the gospel back into persons' hearts? The thrust of the gospel is held captive to modern categories. *Alpha* argues that the Christian faith has become meaningless to the modern world. Therefore, what is needed is an approach that will meet people where they are and move them toward experiencing the Holy

Spirit's power and love. This may mean providing contemporary music, or focusing on experience, or setting forth a reasoned argument about the gospel. The key is understanding the persons to whom one is speaking without giving away the substantive claims of the gospel. The question of what is normative to Christian discipleship remains throughout a person's journey.

This is the great strength of *The Alpha Course*: it adopts a method for making the Christian faith accessible to those who are searching. However, does not this method run the risk of becoming absorbed into modern cultural categories (i.e., experience, reason) to the point of losing touch with the rigors of costly discipleship and the content of the church's doctrine? The problem that can arise is that following ten weeks of study a person can think he or she has received all the points of the faith. The word "alpha," of course, means beginning. What is normative for discipleship remains open to further discussion and growth, regardless of the program. This is why catechesis is important to the ministry of evangelism: catechesis can help to clarify the boundaries of faithful belief and devoted discipleship. What may be "boring" about Christianity is not whether a church has a contemporary band to pep up the worship service but whether the demands of discipleship are being lived out!

But for all of its strengths I also believe that there are areas of caution when implementing *The Alpha Course* in the life of the local congregation: that is, can *Alpha* become tilted toward the experiential to the point of losing touch with substantial claims of the gospel? The Holy Spirit, to be sure, is central in the lives of believers, but what happens, for example, when the focus on gifts remains on speaking in tongues? Or, asked differently, what happens when other gifts are not given the full range of attention for building up the body of Christ?

These questions are not meant to distract from the strength of *The Alpha Course* in bringing people into a saving relationship with Christ. Rather, as churches across the theological and ideological spectrum come to find innovative ways to reach people with the gospel, the assortment of practices and assumptions that make movements and churches unique come to the surface. The time is right for genuine understanding to occur in the areas of gifts of the Spirit for ministry and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual believer and in the life and ministry of the church universal. More in the area of evangelism will also need to take place in the future. In the meantime, an openness toward other faith-expressions is needed, especially with pentecostal and charismatic churches and believers.

But questions also remain with respect to Christian Believer. Here, has the bar become so high that the concerns of those participating are not taken into consideration at all? That is, the program is clear on teaching doctrine, but is there not the danger of being too academic? The great strength of the Christian Believer program is that it shares at the outset the goal of the class: to teach the classical doctrines *of the church*. Christian Believer shows how the church has come to grips with the basics of belief and practice. The church has dealt with the content of faith and enumerated the questions of faith through history. Believer looks at how the content of the Christian faith once given to the saints has developed over time (Jude 3).

But in the overall schema of the Believer program has discipleship become out of reach to those who are searching? Is being a Christian only for persons who are intellectually gifted? Is discipleship now a matter of knowing how much a person can comprehend academically in the areas of church doctrine and history?

These questions raise concerns about the relationship of gospel and culture. With respect to mainline churches, and the United Methodist Church in particular, does an approach to catechesis like Christian Believer remain captive to a middle to upper middle-class constituency that places more emphasis on the written rather than the oral word? What would catechesis look like in an oral culture where stories are the dominant forms of communication?[38] Can the leaders of the churches (the mainline in particular) envision such a venture in faith-formation? What kind of cross-cultural and theological work needs to be done for this to happen?[39]

This critique of Christian Believer is a lament at how far away the churches have drifted from the classical sources of faith and discipleship. The doctrinal illiteracy that pervades North American Protestantism (regardless of class or tradition) is truly astounding, the implications of which will be felt for some time to come. Suffice it to say that for now Christian Believer and *Alpha* are geared toward meeting this need. The growth of these ancient forms of learning only touches the surface of how deep the problem goes.

Concluding Remarks

In light of this analysis, there are several points to consider for the ministry of evangelism.

First, among the churches in North America there is a need to develop a life-long catechumenate. The success of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) in Roman Catholic circles and

the development of Believer and *Alpha* among Protestants suggest the need for catechetical training in a post-Christian culture. However, lest leaders be deceived, more is needed beyond catechesis. Nine months or ten weeks, depending on the program, does not a disciple make! It is a good beginning but evangelism remains unfinished without some form of catechesis for the long haul, indeed for a lifetime. As Robert Jenson has stated, "The catechumenate is again mandated in its original function and intent."[40] The shape of that function and intent (not to mention content) remains open to further discussion.[41] Second, there is the need to struggle with what is normative for Christian discipleship. Both Believer and *Alpha* usher people into ways of practicing and understanding the faith. How may these practices take on different shapes in evangelical, charismatic, and mainline churches? What may that mean for how Christianity is understood? What kind of relationship is there with the practices that Believer and *Alpha* want to foster in "learning the faith"? How may the distinctive methods of evangelism cultivated by each program contribute to understanding the gospel in the life of the church?

Certainly, I do not have answers to all these questions, but I do want to offer insights from Reinhard Hutter who has written that all catechetical training needs to be understood as a contextual enterprise.[42] Hutter writes:

> As "catechetical theology," it is concerned with gradually accommodating a person to the faith praxis (catechetical learning); as "intratextual theology," it is concerned with maintaining the praxis of Christian faith in the most varied situations and with interpreting these situations within the context of faith praxis (peregrinational learning).[43]

The theological task is to understand the unique relationship between the faith once passed on to the saints on the one hand and the culture in which the faith is lived on the other. This requires that the church develop "the implications of the praxis of Christian faith in various contexts; that is, the person interprets faith with regard to precisely these contexts and maintains faith within them."[44] Believer and *Alpha* offer two methods for approaching the ongoing relationship between gospel and catechesis and culture.

Third, there is a need at the local level to understand how Believer and *Alpha*, given their strengths and limitations, can complement the work of evangelism in the church. These two approaches do not need to compete against each other, but they do need careful theological reflection. Given the point above, all theological reflection takes place in a specific historical and cultural

context. There is now the opportunity to explore these concerns respective to particular theological traditions and cultural settings.

Fourth, the pastor as evangelist is also the pastor as teacher. Not only is the pastor called to be an administrator, a counselor, a spiritual director, etc., but also a theologian-in-residence.[45] The pastor is called to think on his or her feet about the ways in which doctrines and practices are passed on in the life of the church. Given the acute identity crisis now facing evangelical and mainline churches, such reflection is well in order, if not past due.

And, lastly, throughout Protestant churches in North America there is growing concern over the nature of those practices that mark the church as a distinct community.[46] This is why reclaiming catechesis is central to any serious consideration about what may constitute one of the church's "core practices."[47] Christian Believer and *Alpha* present new attempts to come to grips with those themes and practices that are central to Christian confession and conviction. At a time when the churches can no longer ignore the ministry of evangelism as a unique praxis of the church, the recovery of this ancient form of learning can point them in the direction they all need to go to flourish as apostolic communities of faith.[48]

NOTES

[1]Reinhard Hutter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), p. 190.

[2]Some of the literature in this area includes Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing,, 2000); Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[3]William J. Abraham, "On Making Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ," in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 156.

[4]Loren B. Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1991).

[5]See William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 174-181.

[6]See Richard Lovelace, "The Sanctification Gap," in *Theology Today* 29 (1973): pp. 363-369.

[7]The influence of William J. Abraham's definition of evangelism is apparent. I owe much of my own thinking to his understanding of evangelism as "that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time." See his *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 95ff

[8]Abraham argues that the process of initiation in evangelism needs the practice of a catechumenate to be complete. The churches, especially, in Protestant traditions, have separated evangelism and catechesis. See *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 174ff

[9]See Andrew D. Kinsey, "Equipping the Saints for the Ministry of Evangelism: Christian Believer and Alpha as Forms of Catechetical Training in the Life of Community United Methodist Church," Doctor of Ministry Project at Perkins School of Theology (November 20, 2000).

[10]Christian Believer - *Handbook*, p. 4.

[11]Christian Believer - *Handbook*, p. 4.

[12]Christian Believer - *Handbook*, p. 5; see also Christian Believer - *Leader's Guide*, p. 9.

[13]Christian Believer - *Handbook*, p. 5; see also the Opening Session Video Segment which speaks to the ways the classical doctrines of the church have provided the boundaries for what is included and excluded in Christian teaching -- *Christian Believer - Video Segment One* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1999).

[14]See Richard B. Wilke and Julia K. Wilke, writers of the *Study Manual for Disciple Bible Study: Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1987 - First Edition). The Second Edition to Disciple I appeared in 1993 by Graded Press

[15]See Video Segment One in the Disciple I Bible Study series (Nashville: Graded Press, 1987)

[16]See J. Ellsworth Kalas, writer of the *Christian Believer: Knowing God With Heart and Mind - Study Manual* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999); *Book of Readings* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

[17]Christian Believer - *Handbook*, p. 4; Christian Believer - *Leader's Guide*, p. 9.

[18]Christian Believer - *Leader's Guide*, p. 10.

[19]Christian Believer - *Leader's Guide*, p. 10.

[20]See Kathleen K. Rutledge, "The Alpha Revolution," in *Millennium Ministry* (January/February, 2000), p. 20.

[21]Kathleen K. Rutledge, "The Alpha Revolution," p. 20.

[22]See Kelly Ettenborough, "On Course with Jesus: New Christians Quietly Sought Over Dinner," in *The Arizona Republic* (January 16, 1991), p. D6'.

[23]See George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 114ff.

[24]See Kelly Ettenbourough, p. D6'

[25]See Nicky Gumbel, *Handbook for Alpha Leaders* (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1997), pp. 44-48.

[26]See Nicky Gumbel's *Questions of Faith: A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1997).

[27]See *Questions of Faith: A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1997); *Questions of Faith Study - Notes* (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1997).

[28]See Nicky Gumbel, *Handbook for Alpha Leaders*, especially the chapter on conducting the retreat; and Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Faith: A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith*, especially the chapters on the Holy Spirit

[29]Nicky Gumbel, *Handbook for Alpha Leaders*, p. 31ff.

[30]This is the main point in "Equipping the Saints for the Ministry of Evangelism: Christian Believer and *Alpha* as Forms of Catechetical Training at Community United Methodist Church in Vincennes, Indiana."

[31]Christian Believer - *Handbook*, p. 7.

[32]Christian Believer - *Teacher's Manual* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), p. 14.

[33]Nicky Gumbel - *Handbook for Alpha Leaders: How to Run the Alpha Course* (Colorado Springs: Cook Ministry Resources, 1997), p. 24.

[34]See Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998); Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983); Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Minister* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991)

[35]Donald Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987).

[36]See Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Faith*; p. 120 ff.; see also George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, p. 114ff.

[37]*Alpha* has a series of short-term classes that follow the beginning class. The thrust is to develop a two year process. See *Searching Issues*, a book dealing with seven topics most often raised by participants in the *Alpha Course*; see also *A Life Worth Living*, based on Philippians and *Challenging Lifestyle*, based on the Sermon on the Mount. For more information on *Alpha*, call 1-800-362-5742

[38]I think the work of Tex Sample can provide a framework for understanding the practice of evangelism in an oral culture. This is an untapped field in evangelism and catechesis. What would an "oral catechesis" look like where the oral has predominance over the written? See *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches: A Key to Reaching People in the 90s* (Louisville: John Knox/Westminster Press, 1990), pp. 92ff

[39]I have found the work of Cheryl Bridges Johns helpful here. While she does not, I believe, go into a detailed analysis of the oral nature of Pentecostalism, she does speak to the importance of "testimony" in such a catechetical process (p. 131ff). How would work in the area of an 'oral catechesis' proceed among Pentecostals and those in the so-called mainline churches? Also, what socio-economic and cultural factors may need to be a part of such research? See her *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 131ff.

[40]Robert Jenson, "Catechesis for Our Time," in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 145.

[41]See Michael Budde, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God: Christianity and Global Culture Industries* (Boulder: Westview Press,1997), pp. 68-70 and p. 131ff. Budde argues for a lifelong catechumenate. The content of that catechumenate, I think, remains open to discussion among various traditions. In addition, see Ellen T. Charry's excellent work on the connection between the pastoral and the catechetical, where she argues for a return to a three-year catechetical process in *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 243.

[42]Reinhard Hutter, *Suffering Divine Things*, p. 50; see also Philip R. Meadows, "The 'Discipline' of Theology: Making Methodism Less Methodological," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 36, Number 2, pp. 82-83.

[43]Reinhard Hutter, *Suffering Divine Things*, pp. 50-51.

[44]Reinhard Hutter, *Suffering Divine Things*, p. 50.

[45]Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen, *The Teaching Ministry*, pp. 122-123.

[46]See *Marks of the Body of Christ*, edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

[47]See Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapid: Baker Books, 1999), p. 141ff; see also Reinhard Hutter, "The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit," in *Pro Ecclesia* 3 (1994): p. 334ff

[48]Reinhard Hutter raises the issue in his article "The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit" of how Protestantism has become an "oxymoron" in North America (p. 335). A post-Christian American religion has come into existence in the soil of the once-mainline churches (p. 335). Recovering ancient practices (e.g., catechesis) is the ongoing challenge in a post-Christendom context.

The Sanctified Soak: Cultural Engagement Evangelism

Donna F. G. Hailson

In the book of Acts, chapter 22, verse 16, Saul--after undergoing his Damascus Road conversion--is encouraged by Ananias to "get up, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Well, now Blue Q--a Pittsfield, Massachusetts-based company--is offering to "Wash Away Your Sins" with its bubble bath and cleansing bar.

The label on the bubble bath promotes the contents as "baptism in a bottle" and "the sanctified soak." The product is directed at "liars, cheaters, and wrong-doers" and promises to remove "stubborn guilt" and to help "redeem sinners the easy way." This "100% holy," "Bishop-tested" and "Cardinal-approved" cleanser is said to leave "no visible sin scum."

The directions for use? "1. Kneel before thy tub. 2. Reflect upon wrongdoing. 3. Run warm bath. 4. Pour in enough bubble bath to equal your sins (double the amount you estimated). 5. Submerge thyself in blessed bubbles. 6. Soak. 7. Arise cleansed from sin and ready to do-it-again."

The experience of all of this is said to send one off bearing a "tempting 'do-it-again' scent."

If the $12 bubble bath doesn't do the trick, one is also invited to call upon the radical power of the soap. The cleansing bar is promoted--by the shapely nun on the box--as "easy to use" and good for "all seven deadly sins." This "sinner's necessity" promises to remove sins, kill odors and reduce guilt by 98.9% or more--all for just $8.50 a bar. How do you use it? You lather, rinse and repent.

I came across these little "treasures" at a store in Wayne, Pennsylvania which--quite appropriately, it turns out--bears the name Anthropologie.

Anthropology is defined *by The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as "the scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of human beings."[1]

What a study we have here in human nature, behavior, and development!

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Shouldn't one anticipate that, once a culture has abandoned the word sin in favor of dysfunction, the "original" problem would make its way onto a parodying bottle of bubble bath sold in a store named Anthropologie? Humans characteristically deny sin, or make a game of sin, or look for ways to wash away or hide sin. So offended are we by the word sin that some of us try to erase the word from common usage in verbal discourse, while others make a joke of it.

The Wash Away Your Sins products were displayed in the store next to Blue Q's Dirty Girl line of cleansers "designed to transform even the dirtiest girl into an immaculate, sweet-smelling specimen of beauty."

Mitch Nash, who owns and runs Blue Q with his brother Seth, told me Dirty Girl in particular, with its "feisty, female sensibility and playful quality" has been a "phenomenon for the company." The Wash Away line, whose packaging was designed by a woman raised in a Catholic household, is also doing well.

"It's about redemption," Nash says, "but done in an offbeat way."

In addition to the soap and bubble bath, the company manufactures a Wash Away Your Sins lip balm in a "cheap red wine flavor." This "anointment ointment" with an SPF of 18, is said to provide "handy salvation for the sinner on the go." It's "redemption in a stick" that must be reapplied frequently "especially during prolonged sin exposure." It "moisturizes as it soothes your guilty conscience" and we're told that, once you have it on, it helps to rub your lips together to boost its powerful sin-purging action.

One can find these products at stores like Nordstrom's and the aforementioned Anthropologie as well as on-line, where one finds some compelling and revealing enticements.

Niftygifty.com offers this come on: "Haven't had time to repent your sins lately? Well, maybe a good wash with this soap will hold you over."

SpaCadet.com leads with this: "Confess in an alter [sic] of bubbles with Blue Q's Wash Away Your Sins. Just as effective as confession!"

Pickyoxygen.com meanders its way thusly: "If only what this bottle claims were true! Remove stubborn guilt. Yes, please. Wash Away Your Sins bath formula isn't vastly different from other bubble baths but we like the idea of symbolically washing away the guilt. Have another drink. Crank call your nemesis. Order the Spice channel. Do whatever your naughty side wants. And let your bath fix it all (if your conscience can handle it)."

And at giftmania.com, where shoppers can purchase Bite the Hand that Feeds You dog biscuits and You're a Mess mirrors, the

lure to buy "the easy-to-use" products is simple and direct: "Sinners rejoice, yes, there is hope!"

What an opening for an evangelist! Yes, indeed there is hope! Through Blue Q we have been given an "altar to the unknown God" opportunity.

Left to their own devices, aren't human beings a mess, and don't we bite the hand that feeds us? Aren't we loaded down with the weight of guilt and sin? Aren't we called to be 100% holy? Couldn't we use a good cleansing, a vigorous strengthening of our characters? Wouldn't we like to have about us a sweet, appealing scent?

Yes, Blue Q is right: we should kneel, reflect upon wrong-doing, repent of sin, be baptized and have our sins washed away.

There is just one ingredient unaccounted for in the product line's formulae, but without that ingredient, the sinner will never be fully clean--she or he will always feel in need of another good soaping. Missing in all of this hype is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Real washing, real sanctification, real justification comes only "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" we're told in 1 Corinthians 6:11. One needs more than just a baptism of repentance or a soapy scrub. One must place his or her trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, accepting His sacrifice as one's own and committing oneself to obedience and faith. Only then will sins be truly washed away, only then will one know forgiveness and pardon, and only then will one bear the sweet aroma of Christ.

But, as too few Christians are about spreading the gospel, and as there is a great deal of confusion about basic Christian beliefs because of the radical revisionism within Christian circles, and as there are many tempting options on offer in the religious marketplace, many folks will continue to look outside the Church for answers. Some may seek to ease the burdens of guilt and sin with the newest product in the Wash Away line: a moist towelette aimed at killing sins on contact and righting wrongs with a wipe.

Evil, sin and death are in the world and each individual tries to manage these realities with whatever tools lie at hand. Jesus used the tools of everyday life to create avenues for the gospel and to provide tangible cues for instruction in various spiritual truths.

With fishermen, He spoke about being fishers of men (and women) and explained the principle of net-casting in evangelism.

He used salt to help His disciples understand that they were to act as preservatives of what is good, that they were to bring a new flavor to life.

He used clay lamps to illuminate how Christians are to serve as lights in the darkness that is the world that does not acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord.

He used the birds of the air and the lilies of the field to let His followers know how loved and valued they were by their Father in Heaven.

Sheep's clothing, trees, houses, rocks, snakes and stones, sawdust and planks, storms and waves, tax collectors and bridegrooms, seeds and soil, weeds and mustard seeds, yeast and coins, lost sheep, unmerciful servants, workers in a vineyard, fig trees and mountains, tenants and talents, virgins and wedding banquets, sheep and goats, bread and wine. Jesus found the points of contact in the culture, familiar touchpoints--in the physical realm--and made the spiritual connections. He used stories and parables and spoke to people where they were literally and figuratively.

We need to use the same approach today and we can start with things as ordinary as a bar of soap, a moist towelette, a stick of lip balm, a bottle of bubble bath.

To play this out, we might think--if we're living in rural, farming communities--how we might use agrarian bridges of seeds and sowing to convey the gospel. With carpenters, the "tools" might be sawdust and planks. I remember once sitting with a woman on a hill and eventually directed the conversation toward spiritual matters. I likened the welcoming of Christ as Savior to the disciple getting out of the boat and walking on water to Jesus. "That first step," I said, "is a beaut but--after that--you're walking on water." I didn't know that the woman was a parachutist but the Lord did. She related to the idea of the first step--getting out of the plane and then the great ride that follows. She accepted the Lord as Savior.

We might consider the matter of popular culture. If there are people to be reached for Christ in and through the entertainment industry, we need to be there. We have to use the tools we have to reach the people where they are. But we must be careful not to leave people in feed-me, entertain-me mode: we must work to draw individuals into genuine worship and serious discipleship.

On National Public Radio's Morning Edition some weeks ago, a question was asked: "What Would Jesus Do in Hollywood?" The reporter doing the piece responded by pointing to some Christians who are working in the industry and deliberately seeking to infuse redemptive analogies into the films on which they're working. The faith is guiding others to avoid using certain imagery or permitting certain endings in the movies. Ministries like Intermission and Slate are reaching out to entertainers.

In New York, near Broadway, the Central Baptist Church is ministering by and with performing artists. This small congregation has added a theatre to the church complex where they area staging their own in-house-written Christian dramas. They are creating avenues into the heart of a neighborhood whose language is the arts.

The avenue, the bar of soap, for HollywoodJesus.com is the internet. The webmaster is David Bruce, who in 1997, attended a series of Billy Graham crusade meetings in San Jose, California where a challenge was issued to Christians to use the Internet for good. At that point in his life, David had never been on the Internet, but he was a missionary at heart and so took the message to heart. He got himself to the nearest Barnes and Noble where he picked up some volumes on website design and computer graphics. Then, with Don Richardson's books *Eternity in the Heart* and *Peace Child* serving as inspiration, he set to work creating a vehicle whereby he could use the culture to win the culture.

The result is HollywoodJesus.com, a website geared to exploring pop culture from a spiritual point of view. Since its launch in February 1998, the site has received more than 57 million hits.

The idea behind the site is simple: to mine the movies for redemptive analogies, to find bridges in popular culture for the presentation of the gospel. The method, or a version of it at least, is tried and true: the apostle Paul used this cultural-engagement approach to reach those who had gathered at Mars Hill in Athens (see Acts 17).

E-vangelist David speaks both with a passion born out of a love for the Lord and out of an exasperation with the Lord's people. He is nothing if not direct. "Because Christians are largely irrelevant," he says, "if there's a life-changing message to present, we'll make it boring and put it in a context you're not involved in . . . Most churches are in four walls but not in the public park." And, he insists, "there are no truly evangelical bookstores. Probably less than one percent of books in any given so-called evangelical bookstore actually has anything to do with evangelism. There are few books you could give to someone who doesn't know Jesus."

David is certainly not alone in lamenting the failure of many Christians to live as salt and light, to live and breathe the gospel. Tony Whittaker, director of SOON Gospel Literature and producer of the monthly email *Web Evangelism Bulletin*, estimates that "there are probably 30,000 English-language Christian sites but it is hard to find even one percent (i.e. 300) which could be classified as broadly evangelistic."

Bruce encourages us to bring these statistics alongside the CNN factoid that claims that there are 58 million free pornographic sites on the web. "Why have we let another medium out of our hands?" he asks. "We did it with radio, television, movies . . . Martin Luther printed incredible tracts that changed the world. Christians haven't effectively used any other media since."

So how does Bruce attempt to use media effectively? He begins with a name for the site that will intrigue both Christians and non-Christians: HollywoodJesus.com. Then he makes it clear that Hollywood Jesus is neither a moral watchdog nor a Christian rating service. What it is, he proclaims unabashedly, is a spiritual, Christ-centered exploration into the deeper meaning behind film, television, music and pop culture.

When the movie, *Blow* came out, the reviewer brought the book of Ecclesiastes alongside of it to elucidate the human struggle to find meaning in existence.

More recently, the site looked at *The Scorpion King* and drew attention to themes within it of sacrifice and love, the willingness to forgive. In the recently re-released *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*, the reviewer claimed to find indirect Christian parallels, suggesting that, in spite of all the riches of this world--even the riches of human relationships--we are all incredibly lonely (we all have an internal vacuum).

"Spielberg's films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *ET* support the idea that we often look to the skies as comfort and hope to fulfill this loneliness in our lives. We admit we need guidance and salvation from a source outside our worldly realm of perception. It even goes to the sad extreme of cults who believe that space aliens will come and save them and take them to a celestial paradise. The good news is that in reality this loneliness can be filled, not by space aliens but by God, through His Son Jesus Christ. In Him we find peace, purpose and that special relationship for which we all ache."[2]

But Hollywood Jesus doesn't stop with the movies. Under the heading, "For the Soul," a visitor wanting to know more about the new birth will find an online version of Billy Graham's "Steps to Peace with God." Online Guidance and Spiritual Direction icons link individuals to gospelcom.net where seekers can find help with everything from alcohol abuse to stress and weariness. Ample opportunities are provided to learn more about the Bible and Jesus. And because Bruce's desire is to use the site as a portal through which pre-Christians can find avenues for spiritual direction, if a visitor wishes to speak with a real person, a link is made to someone who will telephone and talk to the seeker about Christ.

The site is receiving hits from around the world and Bruce is especially excited by the fact that a great number of these are coming from the 10/40 window. The 10/40 window is that middle band around the world that would especially emcompass much of the Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu-dominated countries. In this band lie the greatest number of least-evangelized cities and many of them do not allow open Christian evangelism. Popular culture--via HollywoodJesus.com--is being tapped to open conversations about Jesus in these most restricted parts of the world.

The field of e-vangelism is crying out for missionaries. We should carefully consider and tap the potential for the conveyance of the gospel via emerging technologies, supporting and expanding upon the efforts of such organizations as HollywoodJesus.com as well as gospelcom.net, powertochange.net and other pioneering e-ministries.

Books may also be tapped as starting points for the exploration of spiritual truths. Bestsellers in recent months have included volumes with titles like: *Disobedience; Inner Peace for Busy People; Don't Sweat the Small Stuff; What You Owe Me; Any Way the Wind Blows; How to Be Good; For the Love of Money; Folly; Just Say No; America's God; Leading with Soul; Truth at Any Cost*. The popularity of these titles give evidence of seeking hearts and minds.

The Lord also appears to be doing a new thing via popular music. This year's Grammy awards telecast evidenced the movement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Bono and his band U2, country singer Alan Jackson, and R&B legend, the Rev. Al Green.

The Lord is opening opportunities for Christians to speak in and through popular culture but are we paying attention?

We find a model for this kind of cultural engagement evangelism in Acts 17: 16-34 where we read:

> While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean. (All the Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas). Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'People of Athens. I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown, I am going to proclaim to you.'

Paul went on to interact with the philosophies of Athens. He quoted their own poets and used their words as a bridge for the presentation of the gospel. He praised what he could praise and then drew his listeners toward the truth of Christ. Like Jesus, he used the tools at hand to convey spiritual truths in terms that were understandable to his audience. He translated his Christianese, his theospeak, into the language of the culture.

The result? Some mocked, some said they wanted to hear more and others became followers and believed. In Mars Hill (cultural engagement) evangelism, one contextualizes (making the gospel understandable and helping people see how it relates to them personally) but one does not syncretize (melding it with other religions or values that are antithetical to Christianity). The gospel must be proclaimed but it must not be compromised.

Paul familiarized himself with the culture whose people he was seeking to reach. He knew what people were reading, what philosophies were piquing their curiosity. He looked for and created bridges--in and through popular culture--for the conveyance of the gospel.

Donald Posterski, in his book *Reinventing Evangelism*, suggests that "the tragedy of the modern church is that Jesus' strategy for penetrating the culture with the good news of the gospel has been reversed. Instead of being in the world but not of the world, too many of God's committed people are of the world but not in the world. They have been both captured and intimidated by the culture. They have been seduced by the world and have adopted the world's ways as their own--they are 'of' the world. They have succumbed to social segregation--they are not 'in' the world.'[3]

The Lord has called us to go, to be salt and light, to bear the sweet aroma of Christ, to make disciples of all nations. From bubble bath to the birds of the air, to the movie "Blow," to the current bestsellers in the bookstores and music stores, the Lord is providing us with openings today to present his timeless and timely spiritual truths. May we be faithful to his call by boldly engaging with popular culture in the hope and expectation that many may come to saving knowledge of the Savior Jesus Christ.

NOTES

[1]*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992 ed., s.v. "anthropology."

[2]See www.Hollywood Jesus.com.

[3]Donald Posterski. *Reinventing Evangelism* (Downers Grove: Il.: InterVarsity, 1989), 28.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage.
By David Bennett. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000. 261 pp.

How did the altar call, virtually unknown during the first sixteen hundred years of Christianity, become the dominant form of public evangelism for Protestant evangelicals? David Bennett not only provides a thorough, well-researched answer, he addresses the even more important question of whether such prominence is warranted.

Bennett considers the altar call to be synonymous with "public invitation," that is, a calling for a public response to an invitation following a presentation of the gospel. While such a definition is wider than a request to come forward, it is narrower than some contemporary understandings of invitation. Yet it seems highly appropriate for the kind of historical study which Bennett undertakes.

The book is divided into two parts. The first traces the history of the altar call in Great Britain, America, and Australia, showing its origins and subsequent development. The second examines contemporary usage, providing both critique and recommendations.

Bennett argues that, contrary to some assertions, the altar call was unknown to John Wesley, George Whitefield, or Jonathan Edwards. This not only indicates its emergence from sources other than the great evangelists of the Awakening, it provides Bennett with an alternative approach that was highly successful.

Through meticulous research Bennett shows potential precursors to the altar call in America, but sees its clearly being practiced by Separate Baptists and Methodists by the end of the eighteenth century. With the decline of physical manifestations of the power of the Spirit at the camp meetings, fenced enclosures called "altars" become common as a place to gather the "mourners." This practice, combined with a more optimistic view of human freedom, became a centerpiece of Charles Finney's New Measures. From there it spreads via Methodism to Britain and Australia, and is further developed by later evangelists in America such as D. L. Moody. The story of the British and especially the Australian usage adds depth to what is all too often seen as an American story.

In the second part of the book Bennett argues that despite its widespread use the rationale for that use is questionable. While the invitation itself and subsequent counseling seek to elicit a sincere decision, he believes that "decision" alone is an impoverished view of conversion, underemphasizing both the role of grace and the

often lengthy process leading to conversion. Moreover, it creates a false category of "carnal Christians" who biblically are not Christians at all; tragically many of these "cease to seek for Christ, because they have been told they have found Him." (223)

Bennett urges practitioners of the altar call to avoid prolonged or dishonest invitations and manipulative counseling. But even this would not in his judgment end the false equation of decision with conversion and the "apparent elevation of human means above the power of God." (237) He therefore recommends more thorough study of conversion, evangelistic preaching that is not followed by public invitation, a greater reliance on the Holy Spirit, and a more concerted effort to communicate Christian truth to the general public. This last suggestion is designed to remedy the problem of uninformed decisions through making Christian teaching more widely known.

Certainly this last point has great merit. However, it will be difficult to recreate a society in which Christian concepts and biblical stories were as widely known as in pre 1960's America. Perhaps as an alternative our preaching and witnessing should invite seekers to participate in the Christian community and its practices, opening them to God's grace and enabling them to eventually make a commitment informed by knowledge and experience. This would recover something of Wesley's original pattern and be one way to address Bennett's concerns.

This is a fine study, illuminating in its account of the altar call and provocative in its analysis. It will be helpful to historians and practitioners of evangelism alike.

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Reinventing Sunday: Breakthrough Ideas for Transforming Worship.
By Brad Berglund (Foreword by Ken Medema). Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001. 123 pp.

Reinventing Worship is an accessible, easy-to-read collection of helpful insights for worship leaders. It is intended to be an inspirational, practical resource for those who regularly lead worship, who need to break out of some of the pressures of their own worship routine, and who want a user-friendly guide to much of what is being learned about worship throughout the church. The author, Brad Berglund, is a pastor, church musician, and worship leader. He draws insights from excursions beyond his own Baptist

training into a variety of other denominational traditions, from Lutheran to Roman Catholic, from Orthodox to Pentecostal. He is open not only to the numerous worship expressions across the conservative-liberal church divide, but he is also open to various multicultural impulses. He writes: "The transformative potential to reinvent Sunday is found when an idea is liberated from the limitations of its own tradition and breaks through into a new worship environment (xvi)." Berglund is convinced that the worldwide Christian family displays a rich tapestry of worship designs filled with spiritual depth and cultural energy. Since we in North America are more aware than ever that we are becoming a global village, Berglund wants to glean the best of these diverse resources and make them accessible to a wider audience.

Berglund has organized the book around Robert Webber's four-fold movement of the liturgy: 1. Gathering the people, 2. Service of the Word, 3. Responding in gratitude, 4. Going out to serve. The strength of this book, however, is not that it presents a unified theological vision of worship. It gleans rather creative ideas and puts them together as a smorgasbord of resources for choice and inspiration. Berglund does, nevertheless, want us to know up front his assumptions about worship. He lists them as follows:

1. I believe worship should be offered to God as worship, not as evangelism or as Christian education.
2. Worship is what we, the worshipers, do for God.
3. Although many of the skills transfer, leading worship is not a performance.
4. If we open our hearts to God's presence, worship can transform our lives.
5. Jesus asks us to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. Therefore, worship should activate our whole self, including our bodies.
6. Jesus also asks us to love our neighbor as ourselves. God-centered worship expands our souls, makes us generous, and sends us into the world to love and serve.
7. Like a weekly mini-pilgrimage, worship is an adventure, a journey into the unknown toward God. In that way, worship has flow and movement.

Reinventing Sunday is especially a great overview of worship ideas for lay leaders within a congregation. Reading this book as a worship team, for example, would generate rich discussion. The appendixes offer great examples of thematic worship experiences outside the normal weekly gathering, including home dedications, a healing prayer service, and a Taize service. In reference to evangelism, however, many may want to enter into dialogue with Berglund. He doesn't want worship to be transformed into a revival. This is praiseworthy. Seeker services are also different in character than worship. True. But are there other understandings of evangelism that could allow it to be at the center of Berglund's vision of worship? Although this is an essential question, it is beyond Berglund's purpose. And it's that purpose, a user-friendly, creative guide to worship for church leaders, that Berglund achieves.

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eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation.
By Andrew Careaga. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2001. 216 pp.

Rather than simply reading about eMinistry, I decided to venture into cyberspace for an afternoon and check out some of the web sites featured in Andrew Careaga's new book (which is a follow-up to his earlier book *E-vangelism: Sharing the Gospel in Cyberspace*). It was a fascinating virtual reality adventure, complete with net-speak, MUDs (multiuser domains), Bible-bots, chat networks, and keyboard language. This was definitely not the domain of the over-30s!

But it is the domain of our kids, or so Careaga contends. He begins his book with an examination of what he calls the Net Generation or N-Geners (more commonly known as the Millennials). Careaga argues that alien turf or not, the church has no choice but to understand and use cyberspace because our kids are already there. Unless we do so, we will leave the Net to New Agers and other less savory worldviews that our kids even now are exploring.

The statistics are telling. Some 70% of teens surf the net. Nearly 50% of American teens have access to the net in their homes. And they use it. One estimate is that they are on-line nine hours a week; another estimate puts that figure at 20 hours per week. Teens use the net for a wide variety of activities ranging from email to chat room conversation to net gaming, net surfing, and downloading music.

What is the nature of eMinistry? Careaga says that church is all about fellowship and a sense of belonging and that it is possible to establish what amounts to "virtual community" on the net. The net is a safe and comfortable place for teens. It is an environment in which they can grow their spiritual lives. They do Bible study there. They feel free to bare their souls in chat rooms. They ask questions they would never ask face-to-face (e.g., Is it okay for Christians to have tattoos?). Careaga contends that involvement in web community does not diminish involvement in churches. (It should be noted that Careaga never argues that web ministry could or should replace face-to-face ministry; the "tactile church" as it is sometimes called.) But Careaga is aware of the critics of his position and gives them a voice. For example, he quotes Clifford Stoll who asserts that the web-church is "an illusion of community" and that "the relationships created are shallow, impersonal, and often hostile" (p. 131).

The transitory nature of the net has to be considered. Web sites appear at the rate of 2 million new web pages a day. They disappear just as fast. By the time this review is published I expect that some of the web sites I list at the end of this review will have vanished. Then there is the problem of "truth." Anyone can post anything on the web. This information may be based on careful research or it may be pure fantasy or conscious "disinformation." Even the people one meets on the web may not be real. Teenagers can pose as adults. It is easy to assume the persona of a professor. You can even give yourself a Ph.D. if you wish—as I saw one friend do when signing up for a travel plan on the web. Boys can pretend they are girls. As Careaga notes: "dishonesty is the norm in cyberspace" (p. 94).

What is digitial discipleship all about? What does it mean to do Bible study on-line? From the illustrations given in the book it seems to me that "study" is a misnomer in that it is mostly sharing opinions which may or may not be rooted in the text itself. (But then again is not real-life Bible study often like this?) Sure, you can access any text of Scripture with the help of a Bible-bot (available at some chat sites). And you have access to on-line Bible tools such as commentaries and dictionaries. But is on-line Bible study really the kind of life-changing experience one finds in small groups that work hard at developing community even as they struggle deeply with grasping the text?

Still, if Careaga is right (and he is simply describing what is happening today) the web will not go away and our kids will spend more and more time on it engaged in an ever wider variety of activities. So why not use the web for spiritual pursuits? I suspect that the nature of this pursuit is in its infancy and rather than decrying the shortfalls of cyberspace would it not be better to be a

positive presence there? Andrew Careaga is a pioneer and we are indebted to him for calling our attention to a world we scarcely know or understand.

Oh, and those web sites I promised you (most are taken from the book): For nine translations of the Bible in twelve languages go to the Bible Gateway (bible.gospelcom.net). For a site that links you to various commentaries, concordances, dictionaries see Bible Study Tools (www.biblestudytools.net). If you want sermons, for your own amusement (or horror) do a search on Google for "sermons" and you will never have to write another sermon! Be sure to visit the web site of Charles Henderson, founder of the First Church of Cyberspace (www.godweb.org) and Jesus Café Ministries (www.jesuscafe.com). For N-Geners Christian communities visit (christianteens.about.com); (www.christianteens.net) or (www.teens4jesus.org). One of my favorite sites is that of Tony Whittaker who publishes the Web Evangelism Bulletin (www.web-evangelism.com). Happy surfing!

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Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problems with Transfer Growth. By William Chadwick. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001. Pp. 169.

The reality of sheep stealing has been a problem nobody seems to want to openly confront. Stated another way, we always want to confront *others* stealing *our* sheep, but never do we look hard at our own "hidden problems with transfer growth." What makes this book special is that William Chadwick not only addresses this touchy topic but also confesses to stealing a few sheep in his day. Chadwick's hard won conviction is that the church growth movement must start to come of age and look honestly at this practice for what it is. Stealing sheep is sin and undermines the kingdom work of the whole church. Chadwick convincingly shows that transfer growth can undermine even the long-term ministries of congregations that practice it. This is one of Chadwick's richest insights. He is convinced that sheep stealing is not only ethically and theologically wrong but it covers up the real weaknesses behind many churches' evangelistic practices.

Church growth as a movement has promoted church expansion, according to Chadwick, making sheep stealing a

necessary art form of ministry *and* an accepted church growth principle. How could this have happened? An initial desire for reaching the lost in many churches has degenerated into a desire for the greatest numerical growth. What Chadwick discovered is that the fastest and easiest growth for all churches comes not through reaching the lost but through internal proselytizing, called by Chadwick, transfer growth. In short, since transfer growth is the fastest and easiest rode to "church success," many take it even if it erodes the evangelical mission of the congregation in the long run. This book an attempt not only to show the painful realities about transfer growth but to offer "faithful" alternatives.

Chadwick's greatest insight lies in his unmasking of several weaknesses of the church growth movement. He even claims that the very temptation to exploit transfer growth lies right at the heart of the church growth movement. Donald McGavran's works, for example "Bridges of God" and "Understanding Church Growth" contain principles that act like non-evangelical viruses attaching themselves to healthy mission cells. Although McGavran himself was committed to "kingdom goals," many of his principles actually undermine this commitment. In the years following McGavran's seminal publications, three pernicious principles became absorbed into the mainstream philosophies of the church growth movement. The three principles were "the maximization principle," the "transferring of resources principle," and the "numerical principle." Chadwick examines each in detail and with great effect.

This book might have been entitled "Confessions of a Sheep Stealer." Chadwick's honesty gives the book an air of freshness and credibility many other similar books don't enjoy. Chadwick's insights, although immensely helpful, are filled with theological ideas about mission that are, unfortunately, narrow and, at times, problematic [e.g. He uses a very narrow vision of "Kingdom" and "mission," unlike some theologians he references (e.g. Charles van Engen)]. He doesn't draw any insights from mainline churches that addressed this same problem forty years ago. He even leaves open the option that sheep stealing can be affirmed in some (e.g. Roman Catholics) if not all cases (other "faithful" evangelical churches).

Finally, this book says that many churches have indeed, like the proverbial King, "no clothes". 90% of church growth relies on transfers not conversions. This fact is sobering and needs further evaluation. Chadwick points a way out. This is an important voice in the wilderness and needs a hearing.

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Urban Ministry.
By Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001. 527 pp.

This comprehensive study is in six parts and twenty-four chapters. This organization suggests its origin as the outline of an urban ministry course. The main divisions are The City Past and Present; Biblical Perspectives; Understanding the City; Developing Urban Church Growth Eyes; Promoting Kingdom Signs in the City; Leadership and Discipleship for the Urban Church.

Drawing on diverse resources, including demographic and ethnographic studies, Conn and Ortiz unpack the multifaceted nature of the city as place, as process, as center and as source of creativity and power. Their vision for "promoting kingdom signs in the city" is holistic. Giving special attention to immigration, migration and poverty issues, the authors offer a perspective that is incarnational. "In order to reach out to the poor, we must first reach in among the poor. This incarnational approach may be the stop sign to well-meaning missionaries, but it is essential" (335-6). This is very similar to the method of John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association and publisher of *Urban Family.* In a number of volumes Perkins gives attention to the "3 R's" of urban ministry: relocation, reconciliation and redistribution. This approach refutes three ideas: 1) that congregations which do social action do not grow; 2) that congregations that do evangelism are not involved in society; and 3) that sin is purely personal. There is also structural sin. Congregations must discover and address systemic as well as individual needs.

General literature on leadership and the role of the pastor abounds. In this book, a helpful section on leadership and discipleship addresses issues specific to urban contexts, rather than a suburban or rural milieu. Conn and Ortiz introduce three leadership profiles: relocated leaders, indigenous leaders and multiethnic leadership teams. They identify particular stress points and preventative steps. They conclude that, even if an individual has received a Master of Divinity degree, she or he is probably ill prepared for urban ministry. As a result, they advocate specialized training.

> The truth of the matter is that new curricula have to be developed for leaders to work with the aggressive ideological pluralism in the city and the ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity. It is the task of Christians who claim the authority of Scripture for all of life to now grasp the opportunity to do theology in an urban reality. (397)

The career of Harvie Conn (1933-1999) included service as a home missionary of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Stratford, New Jersey, twelve years in Korea and twenty-five years at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At a conference about eight years ago, I remember Harvie speaking of his writing a textbook. As his health deteriorated, his colleague Manuel Ortiz helped complete the project. The result is an excellent textbook marked by clear writing, Biblical undergirding, a perspective that is both global and local, clear strategies and a vision for what God is doing in the world. Those wrestling with the complexities of the city as pastors, evangelists and missioners planting urban churches in the United States will find this a useful primer. I have used other books by Conn in courses and have recommended this book to a colleague who offers an urban ministry course. Given the global and urban nature of the contemporary world, this book could be used for pastors or laity alike, wherever they serve in North America or internationally.

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A Faith For All Seasons: Historic Christian Belief in Its Classical Expression, second edition.
By Ted M. Dorman. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001. 374 pp.

First published in 1995, *A Faith For All Seasons* provides an introduction to basic Christian doctrines. The methodology of the text elucidates each clause of the Apostolic and Nicene creeds with attention to the historical narrative of Christian belief. In its second edition Dorman, a professor of biblical studies and theology at Taylor University, integrates additional research and contemplation of several issues in response to undergraduate student inquiries from his over a decade of teaching experience. One addition consists of endnotes and bibliographical references to the Eastern Orthodox tradition for the purpose of offering guidance in pursuit of further study. Another revision includes an expanded discussion of Martin Luther and his theology in chapter twelve. Although the second edition is marketed to include a discussion of postmodernism's influence on Christian theology, Dorman claims to have contemplated this task but rejected it (xii). Dorman argues "postmodernism has no definite intellectual content" (xii). Dorman therefore does not pursue a serious analysis of the relationships between postmodernism and Christian theology, but points to Millard Erickson's text, *Postmodernizing the Faith* (1998) for those interested in pursuing the topic.

As a result of Dorman's conscientious attention to pivotal details, *A Faith For All Seasons* fulfills its main purpose as a theological primer by outlining the significance of the development of Christian doctrine. According to Dorman, the text is written to cross confessional and denominational lines. Although evidence of this is demonstrated, the text seems to grow from a Protestant evangelical perspective. The text is clearly organized with informative headings. A notable component of the text's organization is the helpful list of questions at the conclusion of each chapter entitled "Mastering the Material" to facilitate integration of the concepts and historical narrative covered. Dorman also provides case studies of significant individuals, primary sources, and events throughout. Although not a part of the main text, these sections provide pertinent background material in an accessible manner and in more detail than afforded by extensive footnotes. Other interesting characteristics of Dorman's text are the provision of charts illustrating selected complex points and a glossary of terms. The thorough organization of the text, the case studies, charts, and glossary all contribute to its effectiveness as a learning tool, particularly with younger generations who generally have less familiarity with the Christian tradition. Developed and employed by Dorman with undergraduates, this text may also be utilized as a study resource in local church settings with young adults. Expansion of the author's occasional employment of inclusive language with regard to humanity could further strengthen the text.

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Can We Pray for Revival?: Toward a Theology of Revival.
By Brian H. Edwards. Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2001. 213 pp.

This sequel to Brian Edwards' 1990 release, *Revival: A People Saturated with God* is a valuable addition to the growing body of literature that exists on revival. Veteran British pastor and itinerant preacher, Edwards, in his earlier work, extracted five common ingredients in revivals in church history: "an awesome sense of the presence of God, an overwhelming awareness of the seriousness of

sin, an increasing longing for the knowledge of God, an unusual evidence of transformed lives, and a significant passion for the salvation of the lost." (p.10)

The word, "revival" is used by a variety of people in a numerous ways. Hence, a litany of seeming synonyms of the word have emerged including "refreshing", "restoration", "reformation", "renewal", "outpouring", "manifestation", "spiritual awakening", "visitation", etc. This contributes both to the rising level of misunderstanding on the subject and to the high level of cynicism by the skeptics on most reports of revival.

It's not surprising that Edwards attempts in his long introduction to explain what he means by "revival". He laments that the Bible does not define it, nor is a simple definition possible. In order to clarify what he means by "revival," he describes what it is not -- not mission, not supernatural phenomena, not restoration, not reformation, not renewal, and not church growth. "Revival" he concludes "is an act of God's sovereignty" (p.28)

Subscribing to a Reformed perspective of revival, Edwards agrees with Jonathan Edwards, William Sprague and Asahel Nettleton but he exposes the "flaws" in the theology, nature and prescription for revival of American evangelist, Charles Finney and questions the excesses in dramatic expression in charismatic circles.

In the first two chapters the author argues that all key doctrines, including the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, are introduced in the Old Testament. Edwards provides glaring examples of spiritual revivals in Israel for the spiritual survival of the God's chosen people. Undergirded by Scripture, he traces the continuity (similarities) and discontinuity (differences) in the work of the Holy Spirit under the old and new covenants and distils four differences: (1) the person and work of the Holy Spirit are more fully understood after Pentecost. (2) Holy Spirit's activity is more personal an experience (3) His work is massively evangelistic in its results, and (4) disciples of Christ receive a new power and authority to fulfil the Great Commission. (p.66)

In the subsequent four chapters (3-6) Edwards demonstrates that God was a revival-giving God. Chapter 3 contains the nine key factors common in pre- and post-Pentecost revivals. The more difficult and relevant aspects are dealt with in chapters 4 and 5, tackling such questions as: Did the prophets expect revival? When were their prophecies going to be fulfilled -- in their immediate time, in an intermediate future time, or ultimate end of time? What does the prophecy mean? The author believes that all prophets expected immediate any-time revival for Israel and most prophets looked for intermediate restoration during the Messiah's presence and gospel age. However, Edwards concludes there is no hint of ultimate

revival. He further illustrates that one's view of eschatology (pre-, post- or amillennial) colors his/her expectation of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in revivals today.

Can we pray for revival? The reader can shout an emphatic "yes" after reading chapters 6 and 7. The analysis of Peter's prophecy in Acts 3, Paul's prayers in Ephesians and Colossians and John's record of the Spirit's warning in Revelation 2 and 3 suggest that revival is a possibility today following repentance.

Edwards holds the same conviction as John H. Armstrong in his book, *True Revival: What Happens When God's Spirit Moves* (Harvest House, 2001)--that there is a blatant misuse of the Old Testament texts (e.g. 2 Chronicles 7:14) in modern revivalism by its artificial application to the Church under the new covenant. As a corrective, several Old Testament passages are included the final chapter for personal and corporate prayer for revival. The reviewer resonates with the author's conviction that revival, though welcome, is not the only hope of the Church. Faithful proclamation and practice of the Word with the Savior's guarantee is all that is needed for the Church's health and growth.

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A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation.
By Timothy George and Robert Smith, Jr. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 2000. 228 pp.

With a life-long thirst to be a better preacher of God's Word, the reviewer is easily drawn to books of sermons. The reviewer must admit that *A Mighty Long Journey* is an unusual book of sermons for several reasons.

First, it is essentially a collection of 16 sermons contributed by equal number of Anglos and African Americans who have lived out their lives in witness and working toward racial reconciliation. These confessional sermons reflect preaching on this crucial subject in diverse denominations and social contexts, spanning the last four decades. Each sermon is undergirded by responsible biblical exegesis, while being contemporary in application. Coming through each sermon is the Father heart of God passionately pleading with his children to be reconciled one to another in Christ and to demonstrate love and unity. Only an audio or video of the sermon could have further enhanced the pleas of the contributors. Key New Testament passages on reconciliation are treated fairly but the

reviewer wishes there was more than one sermon from the Old Testament.

Secondly, the title is drawn from a traditional African-American chant. The title boldly reflects the magnitude of the systemic racism in American society, the measurable progress reconciliation has achieved, and the great stretch in the journey still to be made. Since most of the contributors grew up when "overt public racism was socially acceptable" (p.7) their sermons are biblical prescriptions to the many facets of it--conflict, discrimination, exclusion, partiality, prejudice, segregation, etc. As one contributor so aptly says, the church "must declare racism as a common enemy opposed to the oneness of the family of God" (p.45). The inclusion of the 1995 *Resolution on Racial Reconciliation* by the Southern Baptist Convention as an appendix is evidence of progress. This collection of sermons by George and Smith generates far more harmony and hope than an earlier collection on the African American dilemma that appeared under the title, *Living in Hell* (Zondervan, 1995).

Thirdly, the book is edited by an Anglo, Timothy George, and an African American, Robert Smith, both serving Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama as Dean and Professor of Preaching, respectively. Their collaboration in producing this book is a wonderful expression of the fruit of racial reconciliation in Christ. Both editors are of similar age and raised in similar socio-economic environments from two cities of Tennessee. They grew up in the grip of prejudice, racism and cultural entrapments of their respective families, friends and neighbors. The editors confess that their journey became shorter because of the radical influence by the personal example and precepts of key figures in their lives. They convinced Timothy and Robert that God is no respecter of persons and that Jesus loves everyone equally.

Fourthly, this book serves as a fitting *feshchrift* in honor of a veteran pastor, seasoned educator, popular preacher and notable author in America. The editors have appropriately dedicated this book to James Earl Massey their long-time friend and mentor and who has excelled as a theologian of racial reconciliation in his service for the Church, the Savior's "Beloved Community". For the reader's appreciation of this servant of God, one of Massey's messages, *"Reconciliation: Two Biblical Studies"* follows the 16 sermons in this paperback volume.

The "Introduction" by the editors was justifiably longer than usual but supremely useful. Apart from describing their personal journeys, they have distilled for the reader the five major themes from the sermons: 1) God's Word calls us to confront the horrible sin of racism, 2) The urgency of biblical faith requires prophetic

proclamation, 3) The transforming gospel of Jesus Christ is essential to racial reconciliation, 4)True racial reconciliation must extend to the level personal relationships, and 5) We are not there yet, but the gospel of reconciliation beckons us forward.

Some may superficially ask, "What does this book have to do with evangelism?" The honest answer is "everything". The Gospel of Jesus Christ is fundamentally a Gospel of reconciliation between God and humans, which makes possible human-to-human reconciliation. Since the Gospel has both prepositional and incarnational dimensions, the book decries conversion divorced from discipleship. In a world steaming with racial conflict and strife, no Christian leader can afford to ignore the biblical principles and practical outworking espoused by this timely release.

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Recovering the Scandal of the Cross.
By Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000. 232 pp.

Two distinctive and able professors, Joel B. Greene (New Testament interpretation) and Mark D. Baker (Missions and Theology) have presented a quite interesting and insightful approach to the theology of the atonement. Published by Intervarsity Press, they attempt to show that the various views (or theories)-of the atoning work of Jesus Christ that have emerged throughout the history of the church have been significantly influenced and shaped by the cultures in which they were framed. This they contend must be realized to recover the "scandal" of the cross, for the death of Christ truly becomes a "scandal" when any society or culture truly understands it.

In light of this basic premise, the authors outline the classical views of the atonement: the penal substitution model, the satisfaction view of Anselm, Abelard's moral influence theory, the ransom understanding of the cross, and the *Christus Victor* approach of Irenaeus. All these views have something to offer, Green and Baker argue, but no one single view is the *only* approach to the atonement, nor does it exhaust the meaning of Christ's death. The authors then point out the weaknesses and strengths of each theory and show how they were communicative and relevant to the culture and society in which they were propagated. There is no attempt to argue that the various views have no biblical basis. Yet, rather paradoxically they contend that "the writers of the books of the New Testament... do

not provide us with systems of theological thought" (pp. 87-88). They may say this because they recognize the atonement as vast and far reaching in its implications and seeing the Scriptures as allowing for various interpretations, at least by way of emphasis for different times and places.

Of course, this principle of being relevant in one's theology of the cross is clearly important for missions and evangelism. Green and Baker give several illustrations to this end, e.g. how the penal substitution theory is not communicative in Japan today. Moreover, it is argued if any one view is pushed to its rational limits to the exclusion of other approaches, it can produce a very distorted view of God and thus close the doors to effective missions and evangelism.

All of this appears practical and in principle biblical. The "scandal" of the cross is indeed an unfathomable event–and we surely want to be relevant in our outreach with the Gospel. However, the authors appear to espouse a quite serious objection to the penal substitution view. They go so far as to say the substitution theory of the atonement "has had ill effects in the life of the church in the United States and has little to offer the global church and mission..."(p. 220). But surely this goes too far. Perhaps their contention arises because it is the view held by most evangelicals in the West, and they want readers to realize that other approaches to the death of Christ do have something to say, especially in other cultures. One cannot but feel they push the point to an extreme. Moreover, as a result, they leave the impression that sin; God's holiness and wrath are over emphasized in the penal view. That is just an overall sense one acquires in reading, but it is there nonetheless.

It must be granted this work fully explores many avenues of theology and reactions to the various views as to why Christ died. Further, it causes one to think more broadly on this foundational truth of the Christian faith. As a book it has something of importance to say, even if (as this writer feels) they have been too critical of the penal substitution view. Christ did bear the punishment of our sins; the Bible makes this crystal clear. And this does not make God a mean tyrant in predetermining Christ's death (Acts 2:23). Still, the book is well worth reading and gives insights that should prove helpful to presenting a broad approach in declaring Christ's salvation as we attempt to evangelize.

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A Pastor in Every Pew.
By Leroy Howe. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000. 179 pp.

The subtitle, "equipping the laity for pastoral care," succinctly describes for the reader the theme and purpose of this book. In our society, where people are inundated with busyness and a myriad of health, economic, and safety issues, the Church must make a conscious effort to help its congregants understand what it means to "love thy neighbor as thyself," offering care to others in the name of Christ. Leroy Howe acknowledges that this job is one that pastors cannot and should not handle alone. He describes for his readers the traits of lay-shepherds and explains how to equip those who are called and gifted to be shepherds.

The style of *A Pastor in Every Pew* is warm and pastoral, including sound theology and practical applications. Although the book can be used as a personal or small group study (with questions for reflection at the end of each chapter), the emphasis is on establishing within a congregation an on-going ministry of lay-shepherding, including training, supporting, and nurturing those called to participate. The art of connecting with a care receiver, of accurately "mirroring" and gently "reframing" the feelings and issues shared with a care giver, the role of prayer, and recognition that a care receiver is ultimately responsible for growth in his or her life are discussed with sensitivity and professional insight. The training manual included at the end covers subjects such as identifying and training shepherds, shepherding the shepherds (including accountability), and the need for referrals. Up to twenty-four hours of training with session outlines utilizing case studies and role-playing are provided. While programs exist that offer in-depth training of laity for the shepherding ministry, *A Pastor in Every Pew* offers both insightful analysis and training material for pastors and congregations desiring to establish a lay-shepherding ministry "that can achieve high quality without placing heavy demands on church budgets and staff."

As the author notes in his preface, "this book is about the special kind of caring expressed by people of faith who want to be of help to others in the name of Jesus." Though its purpose is training lay ministers to walk alongside others within the congregation who need support, the importance of this kind of equipping for evangelistic outreach is obvious. Six chapters discuss the relational qualities that make for effective shepherding--empathy, genuineness, respect, hope and affirmation. The instructional material laced with care-giver/receiver dialogue encourages believers to grow in these relational qualities as part of our own walk with Christ, and affirms them as necessary for successfully shepherding

others, both the believers and non-believers with whom we interact. In discussing the vital importance of listening, Howe notes that "we must develop a genuine interest in what people want and need to share wherever we may encounter them—whether at home, work, church, school, the gas station, doctors' offices, airports, [and] grocery store." Helping individuals who want to be Christ to others recognize, develop and gain confidence in these traits not only strengthens their abilities to minister to believers on the journey, but enables them to share God's love genuinely and effectively with those outside the kingdom. Specific instruction for lay-shepherds on sharing their faith within the context of care giving is not the purpose or provision of this book, and would need to be developed by any congregation desiring to more directly incorporate evangelism with shepherding.

A Pastor in Every Pew is written for the pastors and congregations who want to develop a lay-ministry of providing pastoral care. It is biblically based and discusses issues in psychology that have bearing in pastoral care. Though not highly technical or filled with theological or psychological terminology, it is educational, and will provide practical guidance alongside classroom texts in related seminary classes. As a seminary student and church lay leader with a heart for pastoral care, I have received personal insights and valuable instruction from Leroy Howe's book and view it as an excellent foundational tool for establishing and nurturing a lay-shepherding ministry.

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Living Water for Thirsty Souls: Unleashing the Power of Exegetical Preaching.
By Marvin A. McMickle. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001. 218 pp.

There is a certain pleasure in watching someone do what she or he loves, particularly if one has an interest in the topic. One might have that feeling while reading this book, because Marvin McMickle the preacher/author is a very good communicator. Sadly, the book does not deliver on its promise "to present an approach to doing biblical exegesis for preaching that is accessible to those with little or no theological training," (p. 3). The second part of that statement proves troublesome.

First the strengths: The author writes clearly so a beginner can readily understand the basic concepts. Each chapter deals with subject matter relevant to exegesis. A basic glossary of biblical, theological and homiletic terms is found at the end of the book. Conceptually, therefore, one un-experienced in exegesis can come, by reading this work, to understand the task. Reference works are included in appropriate places. The final chapter offers principles that could serve as touch points for someone crafting an evangelistic sermon. McMickle follows each chapter with a sermon he has actually preached that illustrates the exegetical principle just summarized. Several could serve as good examples of (or starters for) an evangelistic sermon.

One thus can "get" from this book what exegesis is, but one does not necessarily learn how to do it. Ironically, too much of what a preacher does gets in the way. For example, alliteration, good for preaching, here obscures instead of enlightening. Each chapter title (save the first) has a word beginning with the letter "L." A couple simply do not make sense. For example, chapter eight ("Lessons") summarizes the hermeneutical task, but the title implies application, which is actually the substance of the final chapter. To stay true to the author's stated purpose, he should have employed more straightforward descriptive terms.

The book also suffers from illustration overload. In explaining social location, for example, McMickle sweeps through the biblical narrative from Abraham to diaspora Judaism (pages 88-93). This point easily could have been made with less material (especially since he includes a sermon for this purpose). The teacher has overwhelmed the student with his own deep reservoir of knowledge.

Lapsing into the sermonic is commonplace. In one place he starts out to illustrate the number of perspectives one might take from a narrative and winds up at racism:

"There are many people in churches across the country and around the world who know what the Bible says, and can quote it at great length. However, they have a remarkable capacity to only allow their religion to influence them when a matter involves someone within their own racial or ethnic group. Their love and sense of accountability and responsibility do not extend beyond those boundaries of race or ethnicity" (p. 115). He goes on for several paragraphs in this vein before returning to the text, going beyond mere illustration to preaching.

The book contains some mildly embarrassing mistakes--Antiochus Ephiphany (p. 47) instead of Epiphanes, Lot's wife turned into a pillar of stone instead of salt (p. 87). A debatable word study appears. In John 21, Jesus asks, "Peter do you love (*agapas*)

me?" Peter responds: "Lord, you know I love (*philo*) you." McMickle makes too much of this difference and runs perilously close to eisegesis, an inadvertent witness to the necessity of the aim of his book.

Finally, McMickle makes exegesis look easier than it is. The author draws almost unconsciously on his considerable knowledge and experience. He knows the biblical languages. He is thoroughly immersed in historical and social backgrounds. The fledgling exegete would not necessarily make the connections the author makes. She/he needs more "how to" instead of illustrations of what one might produce.

As a book about exegesis, this work would make a very helpful refresher course for a practitioner familiar with the task. For one seeking help in building an evangelistic sermon (having done the exegesis), one probably will wish to look elsewhere.

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Religious Freedom in the World.
Edited by Paul Marshall. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000.
342 pp.

This book describes, evaluates and rates the situation of religious freedom and persecution in seventy-five countries containing most of the world's population. The criteria for assessing each country are encoded in international law. Freedoms include the right to choose, maintain and exercise a religious faith; to change one's religion without subsequent economic, social or political disadvantages; to develop structures for community building; to believe; to practice one's religious faith without coercion.

This last point moves the parameters of religious freedom from the private to the public realm. The freedom to practice one's religious faith includes the freedom to engage in evangelism and missions; to operate educational institutions and other charitable institutions; and to obey God who alone is to be honored. When a state claims religious allegiance from its citizens and denies any of the dimensions of freedom, adherents of any religion must be free to resist or commit civil disobedience when that freedom is denied. As well, the survey covers beliefs that, functionally, take the place of explicitly religious beliefs. These, too, should be protected. Atheists and agnostics may also suffer loss of "religion or belief."

The report cites several countries for religious intolerance. These include Sudan, where Islam in the north is entangled with one of the longest internal wars extent, and the enslavement of thousands of Christians. Other countries where there are egregious violations of the rights of Christians by Muslims include Indonesia, Iran and Turkmenistan. In other cases, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Christian practice is severely restricted, in some instances because Islam is the official religion of the country. Countries not discussed include Afghanistan, Algeria, and Yugoslavia (Serbia).

Christians also face serious threats in countries dominated by Buddhism and Hinduism. These include Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar), India, Mongolia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Despite the ancient roots of Christianity in countries of the Middle East, India and parts of China, Christianity is regarded as western and Christians are regarded with suspicion or outright enmity. In the case of India, hostility takes three major forms: persecution including destruction of churches, burning of Bibles and disruption of church services; communal violence directed against Christians or Muslims by militant Hindus; and restrictions on changing one's religion or talking to people about changing one's religion.

Communism did not disappear with the end of the Cold War. In China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam Communist regimes continue in power. Though these countries may constitutionally sanction religious liberty, in practice they manifest anti-Christian policies. This may include banning Christian activity altogether; harassment of religious leaders; prohibition of the publication or distribution of Christian literature including the Bible; denial of benefits to Christians including passports/visas to prohibit contacts with other Christians.

Christians suffer not only under non-Christian regimes, but also wherever one group of Christians functions in effect as a state religion. Evangelicals encounter resistance from some Orthodox Christians in the case of the former Soviet Union or in some countries where Catholicism is dominant.

Though a conflict is often presented in the media as a religious conflict, as in the case of Northern Ireland or Israel/Palestine, often it is not. In the case of Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants both suffer amidst a conflict that is rooted ultimately in ethnic conflict and colonial history.

This report documents massive, widespread and, in recent years, growing violations of religious freedom worldwide. General editor Paul Marshall concludes that attention to and action on religious freedom have been comparatively weak. To counter any form of religious intolerance, pressure for religious freedom needs

to be focused and persistent, which the authors of this book hope to accelerate.

We all have a responsibility toward the world, which means responsibility towards something higher than ourselves. It is part of our Gospel mandate to defend human rights as absolute and universal. There is no hierarchy of human rights. They must not be denied in any circumstance. Religious freedom is the essential freedom, on which all human rights stand or fall. To advance human rights, we rely on accurate information such as this volume provides along with reports of organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Such surveys must be updated regularly.

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Christian Witness in a Postmodern World. By Harry Lee Poe. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 2001. Pp. 176.

The problem with most books on postmodernism is that they are written by modernists who decide to comment on post-modernism. Not many theological books are out there that reflect the thinking of genuine postmodernists, written by genuine postmodernists. Harry Poe would not claim to be exempt from this observation. But what Harry Poe has done is to write a book on the realities of the postmodern world that is sensitive to how postmoderns live. He tackles things like pluralism, wholeness, the problem of authority figures, and ideology to name a few. But what Poe does well is that he opens up the dialogue in a way that gives the reader the confidence that he really does know postmodern people and how they think.

There are other books on the market that seem to present the issue of postmodernism in contrast with modernity and the reader notices immediately that postmodernism is the lesser worldview being described. Not so with Poe. He makes every attempt to show that the pendulum is swinging, if not already swung. He is honest in looking at the realities of modernity and offers commentary on its failures and accomplishments with a refreshing honesty. And he does it in an often humorous way, citing examples of how he was raised to see the world and how that view is in sharp contrast with the realities of the postmodern world. Example: What are personal relationships like in the postmodern world? Poe says that being raised in the South he grew accustomed to saying, "Yes, sir" and

"No, sir". Yet at Oxford he was challenged by a student who thought that language was servile. While he depended on intuition to tell him when to address someone as "sir" and while that intuition worked well in the South, that title was clearly out of place in a different context and in a different worldview. That title was reserved for royality.

Poe helps the reader understand where modernity drew its view of the world culturally, philosophically, and religiously. In the same way, he helps us understand where postmoderns are drawing their worldview. Examples abound in the book. But his basic argument is what this reader found most helpful. *Postmoderns have really never heard the gospel.* At first glance this statement is sweeping in scope and might seem to be too wide. However, he shows that much of the gospel has been couched in the clothes of modernity and that postmoderns will often reject the clothing and unknowingly reject opportunities to hear the gospel in the context of their worldview. It is not that they have rejected Christ, he says, rather they have never really heard of Christ. Do not miss what Poe is saying. What postmoderns know of Christ has been in the words of Fred Craddock, overheard. They have yet to really hear the good news.

So, for Poe this creates an opportunity to tell the story with great enthusiasm. People love stories, and the story of faith in Christ is a new one for postmoderns. If moderns can get over trying to sell their church or their pastor to postmoderns instead of Christ, perhaps they can present Jesus Christ in a way that lets postmoderns meet one who has authority over their lives that can be meaningful and not oppressive in the way most postmodern people view authority.

Harry Poe challenges moderns from the beginning of the book to the end of it. In fact, his last words leave the reader with something to think about. "The challenge for Christians will largely be one of attitude. If we want to save our culture, we will lose it. If we are willing to lose it for Christ's sake, we will gain it." And maybe that is the observation that troubles most of us when we think about postmodernism. Modernity taught us to win at all costs. How much of modernity are we willing to let go of or lose so that those who have never heard the gospel, can?

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Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News.
By Rick Richardson. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000. 192 pp.

Rick Richardson has written one of those rare books: one that contains genuinely new insights into the process of evangelism. Richardson focuses on a particular audience in this book: contemporary college students (though his insights generalize to other groups). He knows this audience well, having worked for years on the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Currently he is the IVCF national field director for evangelism. During these years of work on college campuses Richardson has experienced first hand the massive shift in mind-set that has taken place amongst college students. "[E]vidence, logic, and appeal to absolutes" (p. 32) no longer reaches postmodern people who assume that truth is relative to the frame of reference of the observer, that logic is no longer either/or (but is often mysterious as well as both/and), and that chaos rules life on the micro level (while macro patterns are complex and beautiful). Couple this with complaints about Christianity (it is anti-women, anti-gay, anti-other religions besides being arrogant and annoyingly benevolent) and you see the problem.

How do we reach people who have this new mind-set? Richardson first invites us to move outside the multiple boxes that circumscribe our evangelistic efforts (our theology box, our sacred practices box, and our structures box) and into the new world of evangelism where experience comes before explanation, belonging comes before belief, and image comes before word (pp. 51-52). He then invites us to structure our outreach around a four-step process of planning (which he borrows from John Wesley via George Hunter). He asserts that we need to learn how to plan *soul-awakening* events which lead to invitations to pre-Christians to join our *communities* where we challenge them to be *converted* which results in *transformation* of life (p. 52). But Richardson does not leave us with only a programmatic outline. He devotes three chapters to the process of awakening souls, two chapters to developing and drawing people into Christian community, two chapters to inviting people to be converted to Jesus, and one chapter on the process of transformation.

In the course of this discussion he proposes a new model for inviting people to give their lives to Jesus; based on the concept of the "circle of belonging" (which is also available as a stand-alone IVP booklet). Richardson uses Gustaf Aulén's book *Christus Victor* as the theological basis for this new paradigm. He argues that the bridge paradigm (and other common evangelical metaphors) is based

on what Aulén calls the *satisfaction* theory of the atonement in which "God reconciles human beings to himself by pouring out his wrath on Jesus, thus satisfying his own justice and simultaneously accepting human beings" (p. 123). But this metaphor no longer resonates with postmodern people who are not familiar with biblical ideas, do not feel accountable to a supreme being, do not feel much real guilt, and do not think in terms of sin. So Richardson suggests that Aulén's so-called *classical* view of atonement (Jesus' death was a victory over the evil powers of sin, Satan, and death which hold people in bondage) might connect better with the postmodern person. This outline of the gospel resonates powerfully with people who see themselves in bondage to the powers of the flesh, the world, and the devil and so becomes a gateway into the light of salvation.

The "circle of belonging" plan of salvation is more complex than other popular "plans" and this may be an issue in having it catch on as a popular tool of evangelism. In fact, this touches on a key issue in the whole of the book. While Richardson asserts at several places "[we] do not need a Ph.D. to share Christ in a postmodern world" (p. 38), in fact to navigate in this new world we do need a big dose of consciousness raising (most of us are more modern that we realize). We also need a lot of new information (e.g., about the postmodern world view) and a new attitude about evangelism (it is okay that conversion is a long process and not just a quick decision). Compared to the old-style witness in which you craft a three minute personal testimony, learn the four spiritual laws, and know a few "answers" to "typical objections to the gospel" what Richardson invites us to do requires a lot more training. But even here he helps us out with various teaching outlines and other aids to learning.

In any case, hard though it may be (especially to those over 35) dare we refuse this new way? The postmodern trajectory is firmly in place and is not going away. If we are serious in our desire to reach the world as it is, we do well to take Richardson's prescriptions with the utmost seriousness. This is a rich and nuanced book that deserves wide reading and, in my experience, works well as a text in courses on evangelism.

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Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling.
By James W. Sire. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000. 224 pp.

This work by James Sire emphasizes the call to the intellectual life as a means of serving God: "The central goal of this book is to identify, describe and encourage those habits of the mind that are central to fulfilling our call to glorify God by thinking well," (p. 9). According to Sire, to abdicate this responsibility is to deny God. Christian intellectuals thus need to enter public dialogues with intellectuals of all kinds, but particularly the secular ones who "live the lie" (pp. 212-16; see p. 215 for exact phrase, which he takes from Václav Havel) by banning a Christian world view from scholarly discussions. The stakes in this situation are high and Sire is issuing the call for Christian intellectuals to fulfill their vocation.

The first part of book offers the work of Cardinal John Henry Newman (the leader of the Oxford Movement in nineteenth-century Britain) as a model of a Christian intellectual. Several large quotes from Newman's "The Idea of a University" provides grist for Sire's discussion. He likes Newman for a variety of reasons, but particularly for his determination to think clearly and to connect deep thinking with holy living. This section of the book, not surprisingly, is a bit abstract (and one wonders if Newman is the best choice), but it does provide the necessary example for Sire as he moves to how to develop the qualities needed to be a Christian intellectual. For a reader put off by Newman's prose, Sire gives a helpful summary of the main ideas on pages 65-66.

Sire then presents some guidelines for developing the habits that help one love God with the mind. First, cultivate the intellectual virtues: passion for truth, passion for holiness, constancy, perseverance, persistence, courage and humility (pp. 106-124). He particularly stresses the importance of *lectio divina* for developing such virtues and offers a very nice description of this practice (pp. 152-159). Here he picks up on one of Newman's convictions that knowing truth is the same as knowing what is, so to speak, really real. Knowledge of truth is thus ultimately an ontological issue. Sire connects this notion with Martin Heidegger's construal of *Being*, particularly that form of knowledge that Heidegger calls meditative, where the thinker is "linked with Being itself" (p. 139). Sire concludes that to know truth is really to know God.

The life of the Christian intellectual thus is shaped by this vision of God's glorious nature, which, in turn, reveals God's will. This makes the work of thinking Christianly qualitatively different than what often passes for scholarship in academia. We are called, Sire says, to "learn the truth, tell the truth, live the truth," (p. 209).

His last chapter therefore is a rather impassioned plea for Christians to think long, hard and deep in order to make God's truth visible in a world overtaken by self-deceptive ideologies.

Sire does not address evangelism in any direct way. The book could be used, nonetheless, as a preliminary text in an apologetics course, since it points to the means by which a person develops the gifts and character of an apologist. In this sense the book motivates the reader to take up the task of intellectually doing the work that supports evangelism. It does not break any new ground conceptually, but could serve as a helpful stimulant, a spur, as it were, to submit to the discipline of grappling with ideas for the sake of sharing the Gospel. The book is accessible to upper level undergraduate and seminary students, but may fall below the bar for anyone who has done much work in this area.

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Beginning Well: Christian Conversion & Authentic Transformation.
By Gordon T. Smith. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000. 239 pp.

Conversion has become a topic of considerable interest these days and Gordon T. Smith's book *Beginning Well* is a useful contribution to this conversation. It is a mature and nuanced theological reflection on the nature of Christian conversion. Smith argues that "beginning well" (i.e., having a "good conversion") is crucial to a person's spiritual life. "Our whole life is in one sense the working out of the full meaning of our conversion" (p. 10).

The book is divided into three sections. The first four chapters deal with foundational matters such how we think about and talk about conversion; conversion narratives (including an insightful analysis of the conversion experiences of Augustine, Ignatius Loyola, John Wesley, and Dorothy Day); and an overview of how conversion has been understood at various points in history. The middle four chapters consist of a sophisticated theological examination of conversion while the final two chapters turn to practical matters such as the conversion experience of second-generation Christians, religious autobiography, and evangelism.

At the center of the book is an insightful theological examination of Christian conversion, beginning with a brief survey of how conversion is described in the New Testament. Smith

extracts seven characteristics of Christian conversion. These seven elements are: belief (the intellectual component), repentance (the penitential component), trust and assurance of forgiveness (the affective component), commitment (the volitional component), water baptism (the sacramental component), reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (the charismatic component), and incorporation into Christian community (the corporate component). All elements are essential although they are rarely experienced in a single dramatic event; rather they are spread over time. "Conversion is a series of events that in isolation may not seem to be particularly significant, but that when taken together have great personal significance. The seven elements, experienced over time and interconnected with each other, reach a certain critical mass at which point their sum constitutes something that is radical, life-changing and transforming" (p.153).

At several points in the book Smith explores the language of conversion as expressed in conversion narratives. This is a fresh and helpful study that asserts, correctly, that much of the language we use to describe conversion has lost the power to capture the true nature of conversion. Phrases such as "accepting Christ," "receiving Christ into one's heart;" "a personal relationship with Christ," "Christ as my personal savior," "being born again" or even "being saved" fail to capture contemporary experience. This is the language of a by-gone era. Smith calls us to a fresh understanding of conversion narrative. He emphasizes that "the authoritative interpreter of a religious experience is the one who had the experience" (p 77). That being the case, he commends religious autobiography as a vehicle for self-understanding that allows us to make sense out of our past even as we gain insight into what we are called to become. He urges us to avoid clichés and jargon in telling our stories. We need to develop a vocabulary that describes what happened to us, regardless of whether this fits the norm in our tradition. He urges us not to gloss over periods of ambiguity and uncertainty. We need to be able to stand back from the conversion experience itself in all its complexity and uniqueness and assess it both theologically and psychologically, understanding that conversion is both very human and filled with divine mystery.

Such an approach is most helpful when it comes to doing evangelism in a post-modern environment that puts so much weight on story. Even as we tell our story, we urge others to write their own religious autobiography. In this way they begin to notice the work of God in their lives and thus respond to God. This is evangelism as discernment: urging others to identify and respond to the work of the Spirit in their lives (p. 230).

There are a few minor complaints. For one thing, the book has no bibliography and given the research nature of the book, a bibliography would have been helpful. Second, although it is risky to critique a book on the basis of what is missing, still it does seem strange that little is said about the role of mystical experiences in conversion, even though many of the great conversion narratives contain accounts of such numinous encounters. Also, although Smith includes the concept of transformation in his sub-title, there is little actual focus on this issue except to name it as the goal of Christian conversion. "Transformation" does not even make it into the Subject Index. Of course, to explore a concept as vast as "transformation" would expand the book to unacceptable lengths. Still, since conversion is a type of transformation and transformation is identified as the goal of conversion, it would have been helpful had there been a discussion of the nature and definition of transformation. Still, when all is said and done, this is a fine book and one that I have used with great success in the classroom. It has the power to provoke in students new and profound insights into conversion. I am grateful to have such a text to use in my teaching.

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Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation.
By Barbara Brown Taylor. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley Publications, 2000. 102 pp.

In her book, *Speaking of Sin*, Taylor claims sin as both a helpful and hopeful word in contrast to the tendency of the contemporary church to avoid such language in pursuit of positive worship experiences for participants. According to Taylor the language of sin has been generally lost in the church today and replaced with alternative languages such as medicine and law.

"When we lose the religious words, we lose the hold they have on the realities they represent. Sin does not translate simply as rule-breaking, for instance, any more than it translates as psychosis. It is a bigger word than that, with deeper roots, and if we drop it from our vocabulary then our language, not to mention our experience, will be diminished."(10)

Taylor argues abandoning the language of sin not only fails to eliminate sin and its painful consequences, but also weakens the language of grace and the full impact of forgiveness for both individuals and communities (5-6).

The text is organized into three chapters and a postlude. The first chapter discusses three trends: pluralism, postmodernism, and secularism as contributors to the abandonment of the language of faith. Taylor is careful to acknowledge the complexity of the language of sin, as the existential state of distance from God and the willful human choices that maintain that distance (16).

The second chapter explores human experiences of sin, providing a constructive argument toward the thesis that sin is a helpful and hopeful word. Beginning with the narrative of Adam and Eve in the garden, Taylor traces the concept of sin through the Old Testament, the consummation of salvation in Jesus Christ, and into the Christian tradition. Taylor asserts the need for Christians to learn to name sin for themselves and become proficient in the language of theology while resisting the temptation to be consumed by the languages of medicine and law. According to Taylor, "Repentance begins with the decision to return to relationship: to accept our God-given place in community, and to choose a way of life that increases life for all members of that community" (66). Sin is therefore the only hope, the recognition of sin serving as the first step towards repentance and restoration of relationship with God and neighbor.

The third chapter offers reflections upon repentance as the church's response to sin. Taylor argues, "Words without actions do not seem very meaningful to me, and individual good intentions without community support to back them up seem doomed to fail" (74). For Taylor, true repentance calls individuals and communities to engage in reconciliation, without forgetting their complicity, toward the goal of restoration of life and transformation of individuals, communities, and the world (77). The church is a place for Christians to confess their sins and seek support in turning back to relationship with God and neighbor. For Taylor, God's grace is not simply the infinite supply of divine forgiveness, but also "the mysterious strength God lends human beings who commit themselves to the work of transformation" (85). Taylor concludes the chapter with a discussion of confession, pardon, penance, and restoration to community as significant steps to those seeking the recovery of the helpful and hopeful language of sin.

Although Taylor does not engage scholarship in the field of evangelism nor invoke explicitly evangelistic language, her text offers a valuable contribution to discourse pursued by teachers and practitioners of evangelism with regard to the implications of languages such as sin and salvation. Taylor's contribution is embodied in her thoughtful argument, possessing theological depth rooted in scriptural exegesis, as well as her insight into the contextual issues faced by congregations and their leaders. Taylor's

text reflects upon the need to bring translations of complex and rich spiritual concepts related to sin and salvation from scripture and the Christian tradition to contemporary Christians and their communities.

Taylor's text is profound in that it may serve a multiplicity of audiences, providing theological definitions useful to the seminary classroom as well as resources for study by lay persons with strong biblical and theological backgrounds. *Speaking of Sin* would be pertinent as an introductory text within a seminary curriculum as a tool for integrating scriptural, historical, and theological concepts for reflection upon ministry practices. Congregations, including clergy leaders, would benefit from individual or group study of the text, both for its theological articulation and examples of embodiments of language and gestures relating to sin and salvation.

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Servant Leadership for Church Renewal: Shepherds by the Living Springs.
By David S. Young. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999. 176 pp.

This book is a companion to the author's *A New Heart and a New Spirit: A Plan for Renewing Your Church* (Judson, 1994). Based on the model of servant leadership (especially as articulated by Robert Greenleaf), Young presents a process by which pastors may lead their congregations through a renewal process. The author is a Church of the Brethren minister who has served a number of churches either as regular or interim pastor.

The essence of Young's approach is what he calls "a sevenfold process of organizing for renewal" incorporating "three movements of spiritual vitality—upward, inward, and outward." The initial "upward movement" focuses on a deeper spiritual walk and finding a biblical vision. The "inward movement" breaks down into four steps: 1) forming a renewal team, 2) identifying the congregation's strengths and needs, 3) identifying a leadership model, and 4) envisioning a renewal plan. The "outward movement" is impleation. Young illustrates this model graphically on page 39.

This is a deceptively simple book. It is not highly academic in form or content. A pastor might use it profitably with a group of leaders without its being intimidating. Some, however, will wish for more biblical, theological, and practical substance.

Strengths of the book are its emphasis on servant leadership, its advocacy of the use of teams, and the key point (which Young states repeatedly in various ways) that genuine renewal grows out of an authentic spirituality. The following quotes give the flavor of the book: "[A] special kind of leadership fits church renewal: *a servant-leadership style* rooted in the Scriptures." The "best church leaders are gentle shepherds like the Good Shepherd, Jesus." "Rather than superimposing their ideas on everyone else, servant leaders call forth the gifts of others." "My best ideas for church renewal begin with my own prayer discipline." "[T]he leader's task is to grow spiritually and to help others grow spiritually as well." "Servant leaders learn a style of teamwork. In this, they see that they are modeling the church." Biblical models show that servanthood "is a strong model of leadership," not a "weak or servile" one. Young reiterates in various ways that authentic servant leadership is not passive or weak but involves initiative and creativity.

The book has some limitations, however. Although Young stresses that a church's renewal plans should grow out of Scripture, he gives little guidance on how this process actually works. The examples he gives (he makes much of Rev. 7:17 and of the Servant Songs in Isaiah) are of limited help. It is not clear that, or how, the renewal principles articulated actually grow out of the Scriptures cited. To this reviewer the book's biblical expositions at times seemed artificial or overdrawn.

Another issue is the *definition* of church renewal that seems to be assumed in the book. What is a genuinely renewed, or vital, church? Young does not address this directly, though he does highlight outreach: "When a church is touching lives, caring for others, and inviting them into a relationship with the living Lord, it is in renewal." Judging by the various examples given, however, one might conclude that renewal is any new plan or initiative that is successful and that in some way pushes the church into outreach. Theologically speaking, the author seems to assume a fairly modest conception of church renewal.

Servant Leadership for Church Renewal is more a meditation on leadership than a treatise. The style is accessible, though a bit repetitive. Eight worksheets at the end increase the practicality of the book. Pastors of static or declining churches unsure of how to bring change could find the book helpful in prompting creativity and intentional renewal in the local church.

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INFORMATION FOR SUBSCRIBERS AND AUTHORS

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