EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 23

Articles and book reviews original and selected from publications worldwide for an international readership for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

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Evangelical Review of Theology

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WEF International Office, 141 Middle Road, #05–05 GSM Building
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Editorial

Evangelical theological activity is in a healthy state if we can judge by the number of books and journals being published. Many substantial volumes have appeared in recent years, and the number of seminaries and theological societies producing their own journals has proliferated. Mention may also be made of frequent conferences in all parts of the world, and now the possibilities presented by improved communications, discussions and publishing via the Internet.

According to some observers, however, this high level of activity masks a serious problem. For example, David Wells argued in his *No Place for the Truth* (Eerdmans, 1993; reviewed in this journal, October 1994) that despite this extensive amount of theological and scholarly work, there is no definitive role for theology in the evangelical church. He believes that theology as the source of truth about God has become peripheral to the life of the church whose future is therefore in grave doubt. Similar observations about ethics appear in his recent *Losing our Virtue: why the Church must recover its moral vision* (Eerdmans, 1998) reviewed in this issue.

Whether we are thinking of the foundational biblical doctrines or the way the Christian message is expressed in any particular context, theology will always be needed to clarify, expound and apply the faith and to nourish the church in its worship, witness and service. However, what seems to be at stake in the mind of Wells and others who share his views is the ability of the church to integrate theology into its being and life as a dynamic unifying force for faith, spirituality and service. The essays in this issue explore aspects of this process.

Senior evangelical theologian, Donald G. Bloesch draws upon the rich heritage of the Christian faith and experience to show that theology is creative and transforming as it articulates the divine revelation in Christ. Thus personal commitment to Christ and a missionary dimension are key factors in the renewal of theology.

In calling for the revisioning of the theological task, Stanley Grenz emphasizes the importance of the setting of theology in the community of faith and its relationship to the life of that community. Thus, it has a practical outcome in enriching and motivating the church and fostering a spirituality that overflows into daily life.

By analysing conditions in Africa, Andrea Ng'weshemi shows how theology must be related to its context if it is to be meaningful for the church and the community; it is in these circumstances that the 'Christ symbol' and the 'Christian story' will have the power to speak powerfully and effectively to the human situation.

With Dr Cole's essay, we turn to the way theology must be taught and learned. In a carefully structured argument looking at the development of the discipline and with an eye to practical detail, he shows how the experiential and the cognitive aspects of theology can be brought together in a creative and dynamic manner in the school curriculum.

Finally, Roy Clements provides an example at the local church level of the integration of mind and passion by showing how the Bible should be expounded in a contemporary setting, paying attention especially to the way the truth of Scripture can be presented to the heart and will as well as to the mind through the medium of expository preaching.

These essays are presented as useful models of creative yet faithful theological work which is intimately related to the life of the church and the individual Christian. They show how contemporary evangelical theology can move beyond inflexible dogmatism and sterile intellectualism to become an indispensable source of vision and strength for the church as it carries out its mission of witness and service in the future.

David Parker, Editor.

The Renewal of Theology

Donald G. Bloesch

Theology must not be confused with any rival discipline that bases its credibility on religious or human experience, even if that experience is confirmed by scientific verification. Theology is neither philosophy—a description of ultimate reality—nor psychology—an exploration into the inner states of the human mind. Nor should theology be confused with mysticism, which focuses on the *image* of reality contrived by human imagination rather than on the spoken *word* that overturns human imagination. Theology cannot be subsumed under other disciplines of knowledge just as revelation cannot be subordinated to human reason. Theology leads us out of the morass of subjectivity and relativity into knowledge of ultimate being that we could not attain on our own. It witnesses not to an altered state of consciousness but to a personal being beyond us, who condescends to our level, who meets us on our plane of being and understanding. Theology employs language drawn from metaphysics, but it is not itself metaphysics, for its overriding concern is not a comprehensive understanding of reality but the transformation of reality by the Spirit of the living God.

THEOLOGY DEFINED

From this perspective, theology is the systematic reflection within a particular culture on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested in Holy Scripture and witnessed to in the tradition of the catholic church. Theology in this sense is both biblical and contextual. Its norm is Scripture, but its field or arena of action is the cultural context in which we find ourselves. It is engaged in reflection not on abstract divinity or on concrete humanity but on the Word made flesh, the divine in the human.

This position stands in fundamental conflict with both the old and the new liberalism. Albrecht Ritschl saw the task of theology as 'the articulation of a disciplined theoretical defense of the practical certainty of faith in the divine governance of the world'.[1] Here the fulcrum of theology is not the Incarnation of the Word of God in history but faith's venture in obedience to the providential reordering of the world.[2] For the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez theology is 'a critical reflection on historical praxis'.[3] Praxis in this context means involvement in the class struggle to build a new society. Thus the emphasis is not on what God has done for us in biblical history but what we can do to spearhead the coming of the kingdom.

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[1] 1. George Rupp, *Culture-Protestantism: German Liberal Theology at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 33.

[2] 2. 'The immediate object of theological cognition is the community's faith that it stands to God in a relation essentially conditioned by the forgiveness of sins.' Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macaulay, 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. 3.

[3] 3. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 6.

It is commonly said in neoliberal circles that the task of theology is to construct a new view of the world or forge a new synthesis of meaning in the light of the tremendous changes in human culture since the Enlightenment. Instead of the grandiose design of creating a meaningful world (the thrust of Gordon Kaufman's constructive theology),[4] I uphold the more modest agenda of an evangelical dogmatic theology: to expound the significance of the new creation that has broken into this world from the beyond. Theology is not an analysis of the vagaries of universal religious experience nor an exploration of the possibility of meaning in a meaningless world but an exposition of the particularities of Scripture that bring meaning to the otherwise desolate landscape of human existence.

Theology is the diligent and systematic explication of the Word of God for every age, involving not only painstaking study of the Word of God but also an earnest attempt to relate this Word to a particular age or cultural milieu. Theology in the evangelical sense is the faithful interpretation of the biblical message to the time in which we live. It must struggle to elucidate the relevance of the cross and resurrection victory of Jesus Christ for our time and place in history, not simply reaffirm past interpretations or repeat creedal formulas of another era.

Theology is a science not in the sense of natural science but in the sense of wisdom: it is certain and true. I here side with Duns Scotus, who followed Aristotle in contrasting science with opinion and conjecture because of its certainty and truth. Yet Scotus denied that theology is a science in the strict sense, his ideal being mathematical science. Here he differed from Thomas Aquinas, who saw theology as a speculative science. This does not mean, however, that its doctrines are only moral postulates. Theology endeavours to present a true picture of the activity of divinity that serves to illumine the pilgrimage of faith. Its purpose is not to give abstract knowledge of God but to direct humanity to its spiritual home for the glory of God. God has provided a revelation of himself sufficient for us to think deeply and rightly concerning his will and purpose so that we may implement his plan for the world in faithful service. Yet God has not given us an exhaustive knowledge of the inner workings of his Spirit or a direct perception of the essence of his being. As Scripture says, 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law' (Deut. 29:29).

Even though we cannot claim a comprehensive knowledge of God as he is in himself, we must not suppose that God in himself is other than God as he relates himself to us in Jesus Christ. To know God in Christ is to know God in himself, that is, God as he exists in the paradoxical unity of majestic holiness and unbounded love—though this is always a partial and broken knowledge waiting for completion on the day of redemption.

The method of theology is not reason preparing the way for faith (Abelard) but faith seeking understanding (Anselm). This is not the method of correlation (Tillich) but that of faithful explication. Theology is not existential-ontological, proceeding from existents to Being-itself (Macquarrie), but revelational-situational, proceeding from God's self-revelation in Christ to the human existential situation.

The sources of theology are Scripture and tradition, but the first has priority. Scripture is the primary, tradition the secondary, witness to divine revelation. Culture or human experience is the medium of revelation but not its source or norm. I take issue with Schillebeeckx, who sees the sources for faith as the traditional experience of the Judeo-Christian movement and the contemporary human experiences of Christians and non-

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[4] 4. See Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 21–57, 263–79.

Christians.[5] I prefer to speak of contemporary human experience as the field of theology but not its source or norm.

Karl Barth has wisely advised Christians to have the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other—the Bible to give us the criteria for faith and action, the newspaper to give us sufficient knowledge of the current situation to enable us to apply the directives of our faith in a meaningful fashion. We neglect either of these at our peril.

Yet the concern for relevance can be carried too far. Thomas Finger speaks not only of a 'kerygmatic norm' for theology but also of a 'contextual norm'.[6] 'The extent to which theology is intelligible within the experience and thought-world of its context is also a standard by which its adequacy may be measured'.[7] At the same time, he cautions against judging the truth of theology by the norms of any context. The contextual norm sets the stage for the way we formulate and convey our message. In my opinion this view still gives too much weight to the context in determining the credibility of the Christian message. The gospel gains its credibility only by the power of the Spirit, and though we must employ the language of our day in expressing the truth-content of faith, this truth must never be brought into even partial accord with the criteria for truth entertained by the culture.[8]

In the last analysis liberal theology is fundamentally anthropology. Its focus is on human existence or self-understanding. Here Reinhold Niebuhr reflects his liberal heritage, declaring theology to be not a science of God but 'a rational explication of man's faith'.[9] Herrmann views faith as confidence in one's own experience as a Christian. Bultmann defines theology as 'the conceptual presentation of man's existence as an existence determined by God'.[10] Schillebeeckx bases his theology on a phenomenological analysis of human existence or the universal experience of suffering humanity. According to Troeltsch the role of dogmatic propositions is to unfold the contemporary consciousness of the church.

In the evangelical theology I propose, the focus is neither on divine essence nor on human existence but on divine existence in humanity, as we see this in Jesus Christ.

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[5] 5. Schillebeeckx, Jesus, p. 13.

[6] 6. Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 1:54.

[7] 7. Ibid.

[8] 8. Finger's eschatological contextual theology leads him to bring the faith into a partial harmonization with the ideological movement of modern feminism, to the extent that he can advocate calling God 'She' as well as 'He'. Theology, he says, must let itself be challenged by 'reality's openness to change, growth and the partially unknown'. See Thomas Finger, 'Donald Bloesch on the Trinity: Right Battle, Wrong Battle Lines'. *TSF Bulletin* 9, no. 3 (Jan.–Feb. 1986):21.

[9] 9. Patrick Granfield, ' "Christian Realism": An Interview with Reinhold Niebuhr', *Commonweal* 85, no. 11 (Dec. 16, 1966):320.

[10] 10. Rudolf Bultmann, 'The Problem of a Theological Exegesis of the New Testament', in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed., James M. Robinson (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968), p. 252. Along these same lines Gabriel Fackre, who was deeply influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, defines theology as the 'ordered reflection that seeks to elaborate and render intelligible the faith of the Christian community'. *The Christian Story* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 1:16. Both Niebuhr and Fackre stand closer to Schleiermacher than Barth in their theological method. Barth would say that the object of theology is neither human faith nor Christian faith but divine revelation that stands over and against the community of faith, that continually calls the faitn-perspective of the community into question, that provides the absolute standard by which the community must reform and purify its faith. Fackre's divergence from Barth is conspicuous in vol. 2 of his *Christian Story*, where he includes 'the world' as a criterion for faith (see pp. 51–54).

Theology is not the verbalization of religious experience (Schleiermacher), even less of common human experience (David Tracy). Instead, it is the articulation of a divine revelation that breaks into our experience from the beyond and transforms it.

The Catholic philosophical theologian Bernard Lonergan has defined theology as 'reflection upon conversion in a culture'.[11] If this were taken as an exhaustive definition (which Lonergan does not intend) it would end in rank subjectivism, since human conversion takes many forms. The focus should be not on the experience of faith but on its object—its ground and its goal. The basis of our theology can be none other than God's incomparable act of reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

In the theological method I advocate, we do not adduce true insights from Scripture (Finger), nor do we deduce true propositions from Scripture (Carl Henry). Neither do we infer general truths from Scripture by an investigation of particulars—the way of induction (Charles Hodge). Instead, we discover the truth within Scripture after being confronted by the One who is the Truth—Jesus Christ. We begin not with Scripture as a historical text but with the living Word of God—Jesus Christ—and then try to ascertain how Scripture bears witness to him.[12]

Theology is neither 'experiential-expressive'—expressing the universal aspect of human experience (as in Tracy)—nor 'cultural-linguistic'— purporting to describe the cultural-linguistic reality of Christian word and life (as in Lindbeck).[13] Instead, it is creative-transforming—seeking to critique the life and symbols of the church as well as the experience of the culture in the light of the new reality of Jesus Christ. It brings a new horizon to both the church and the world that alters, sometimes dramatically, the church's faith-understanding as well as overturning the culture's self-understanding.

I agree with Tillich that theology is neither an 'empirical inductive' nor a 'metaphysical deductive' science.[14] Nor can we say (and Tillich concurs) that it is simply a combination of both. Yet I take issue with him when he says theological understanding is grounded in the mystical a priori, which transcends the cleavage between subject and object. Theology is a faith-responsive science. God makes himself an object to our understanding in the event of revelation, but this can be perceived only in faith.

DOGMA AND DOCTRINE

Ever since the Enlightenment, dogma has been viewed with suspicion, especially by Protestants. Harnack regarded dogma as the unwelcome intrusion of the Greek spirit into the world of biblical faith.[15] According to Ritschl, our focus should be not on dogmas about God and Christ, which tend to remove faith from history, but on value judgments that are rooted in the experience of the redemptive work of Christ in history.[16]

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[11] 11. Stephen Happel and James J. Walther, *Conversion and Discipleship* (Philadelpha: Fortress, 1986), p. 145. See Bernard J.F. Loergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. xi.

[12] 12. Once we see Scripture in the light of its divine centre and goal, we are then free to use both induction and deduction in the task of understanding the full import of the scriptural message.

[13] 13. See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 30–45.

[14] 14. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:8–9.

[15] 15. Harnack, History of Dogma, 1:17.

[16] 16. Ritschl, The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation, pp. 203–12, 398–99.

Dogma has undergone variations of meaning through the centuries. In the New Testament, *dogma* referred to a decree, ordinance, decision or command ([Lk. 2:1](); [Acts 16:4](); [17:7](); [Eph. 2:15](); [Col. 2:14](); [Heb. 11:23]()). In Greek philosophy it came to mean doctrinal propositions expressing the cardinal beliefs of a particular school of philosophy. In Roman Catholicism it assumed the form of authoritative declarations of the faith by the teaching magisterium of the church on the basis of special illumination granted to it. Because dogma was said to have its source in Scripture and church tradition, the church came to speak of revealed dogmas, bearing the stamp of infallibility. The Protestant Reformers challenged the infallibility of church dogmas, appealing to Scripture alone as the source of authority and revelation. In place of dogmas they drew up confessions of faith that were to be always under the authority of Scripture. In the development of Reformed theology dogma has come to mean an expression of the truth of faith that has achieved official status in the church but is not itself infallible.[17]

For Karl Barth dogma is 'the agreement of Church proclamation with the revelation attested in Holy Scripture'.[18] It is therefore an eschatological concept, since there will never be perfect agreement between church proclamation and the eschaton until the parousia, when Christ comes again. Unlike Harnack, Barth did not dissolve dogma in the relativities of history, but he saw dogma as the transcendent goal and model of dogmas.

With Barth I see the need to hold on to the concept of dogma but not to confuse dogma with church formulations that always bear the mark of historical and cultural relativity. Dogma is the divinely given content of the faith apprehended and proclaimed by the believer in the act of obedience. It is the revelational meaning of the biblical message given to us in the act of bearing witness to the faith. Dogma is to be associated with God's self-understanding; dogmatics signifies an expression of the believer's reflection about God.

It is important to distinguish between dogma and doctrine. Dogma is the divinely inspired apostolic interpretation of the events of redemption. Doctrine is the systematic affirmation of this divinely inspired interpretation by the theologians of the church. Dogma is what God declares; doctrine is what the person of faith articulates. Doctrine is dogma condensed in a propositional statement accessible to human understanding and *eo ipso* distortion. Dogma is irreversible and irreformable. Doctrine is open to reformation and correction, but its dogmatic content is irrevocable and unalterable. Dogma in the plural is equivalent to doctrines, but in the singular it ordinarily indicates the content of revelation.

When dogma is translated into dogmas or doctrines, it enters the stream of historical relativity and loses its absolute status. In the process of translation, revelational truth—the truth of personal address—is transmuted into a purely propositional truth—the truth of cognitive mastery.[19] Receiving reason is now superseded by controlling reason.

In its fundamental meaning dogma is always alive and dynamic because it is God speaking and the believing subject hearing. Barth rightly asks, 'Is the truth of revelation

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[17] 17. McKim reminds us that for the Reformers and their followers 'faith is personal trust and relationship with God through Jesus Christ, not primarily assent to what the church says must be believed'. Donald McKim, 'Dogma', in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 328.

[18] 18. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 1(1):304.

[19] 19. There is, to be sure, a propositional element in revelational truth in that this truth is a claim that calls for our acceptance and obedience. But this is a claim that presses itself upon our understanding rather than a claim that has been reduced to an object of our understanding. It is an announcement of unfathomable grace that can only be received in gratefulness, not a general truth that is there to be assimilated into a conceptual system. It is a command that calls us into action, not a principle that is ever at our disposal.

… like other truths in the sense that it may be established … as the manifestation of something hidden, in human ideas, concepts and judgments, that it may be, as it were, conserved in this restricted and specialized form, that it can be had as truth apart from the event of its being manifested?'[20]

Doctrine represents the crystallization of dogma, the articulation of the truth of revelation in the form of a guiding standard or normative witness. Doctrines can be trustworthy when they are controlled by the dogmatic norm of the law and the gospel. I concur with Avery Dulles that with qualifications, 'one may hold that right doctrine, insofar as it accurately mirrors the meaning of the original message, is, in its content, revealed. God's revelation achieves itself through human concepts and words'.[21] Doctrine is nonetheless always open to reformulation as more light breaks through from God's Holy Word. Dogma by its very nature cannot be revised, but doctrine is open to revision as we are led into a deeper or fresher understanding of dogma.

I agree with Barth that dogma has an eschatological thrust. Because our apprehension and formulation will never be in total harmony with the divine revelation until Christ comes again, we need to struggle for a fuller understanding of dogma. Our dogmatic formulas are necessarily incomplete, for God is hidden even in his revelation. This does not mean, however, that they are necessarily untrue. Nor can they be regarded as nonbinding so long as they have their source and inspiration in Scripture.

A dogma represents a claim to absolute truth, but it is also a claim to obedience (Brunner). We can have absolute truth, yet only in the act of obedience. Because disobedience always accompanies our obedience, truth becomes mixed with untruth. By the grace of God we can nevertheless make true statements about what God has revealed to us, but our formulations will invariably show the signs of special interests, historical conditioning and cultural limitations. We must therefore constantly return to the source, Holy Scripture, in order to reformulate the content of the truth of revelation for new situations. No doctrinal formulation is ever in and of itself infallible or irreformable. But it can nonetheless bear and communicate infallible truth.

Dogmas and doctrines are necessary because the church must distinguish sound doctrine from unsound doctrine, whatever the cultural pressures to divert it from this task. The church is compelled to articulate the faith more precisely when it is threatened by heterodoxy and heresy. At the same time, the dogmas of the church must never be identified with the Word of God itself. As Barth poignantly says, 'The Word of God is above dogma as the heavens are above the earth'.[22]

Church dogmas are not revealed propositional truths but human affirmations born out of fidelity to divine revelation. While not an identity, there is a continuity between the dogma of revelation and church dogma. The dogma of revelation is the story of salvation—but as interpreted by the Spirit of God to the church. We can grasp it only as we are grasped by it. We can have it only by returning to it again and again. 'Even in the Scriptures', Brunner observed, 'the divine dogma is not simply "given", but it is given in such a way that at the same time and continually it must be *sought*'.[23]

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[20] 20. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. G.W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1(1):269–70.

[21] 21. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 223.

[22] 22. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. Thomson, 1(1):306.

[23] 23. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 106.

The dogmatic norm in the Bible is the law and the gospel: the law illumined by the gospel and the gospel fulfilled in the law. But as soon as we define what the gospel is, we have the kerygma, not the gospel. The gospel transcends human formulations even while it is reflected in these formulations.

Dogma is not the last word but the beginning word. When our eyes are opened to the revelatory meaning of what God has done for us in Christ, we embark on a pilgrimage of faith that involves a lifetime of striving to understand what the Spirit is teaching us to see. Dogma is therefore not only the ground of our faith-understanding but its goal and culmination.

We can cherish the dogma of the two natures of Christ, as defined by the Council of Chalcedon (AD. 451), while recognizing it to be an imperfect reflection of the divine mystery of God in Christ. It is binding on the church but not absolutely infallible in the sense of being faultless or undeceiving. It is not in and of itself infallible, but by the illumination of the Spirit it communicates infallible truth, that is, dogmatic truth. It is binding in the sense that it must be taken seriously as a normative statement of the church's faith. Its truthfulness is based on its continuity with the mind of Christ as this is reflected in the church.

The truth of every church dogma and doctrine is ultimately grounded in the revelation that God has given to us in Jesus Christ and that he gives again through the work of his Spirit in the church. Thomas Torrance is indubitably correct when he declares, 'The truthfulness of theological statements … depends not on the truthfulness of their intention but on a participation in the Truth which God alone can give.'[24] They must certainly be guided by 'the truth content of the Scriptures, but what must determine theological formulation is the objective truth forced upon the interpreter of the Scriptures by God himself'.[25]

In recent years there have been new interpretations of dogma in Roman Catholic circles. Hans Urs von Balthasar regards the propositions of dogma as true 'insofar as they are a function and an expression of the Church's understanding of the Christ-mystery, as given to it by the Holy Spirit. They cannot be taken out of this setting; therefore, they do not have any *purely* theoretical (i.e., non-experiential, non-existential) truth'.[26] Gerald O'Collins cautions that no 'dogmatic statement can ever exhaustively express the mystery of God's self-communication in Christ. Here as elsewhere faith must continue to "seek understanding" and appropriate new formulations'.[27] O'Collins is insistent that dogmas cannot and should not be treated as ultimate norms. 'The supreme rule of faith' is found in 'the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition'.[28]

Karl Rahner here resonates with much of what is being said in this chapter: 'The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulas, the classic condensations of the centuries- long work of the Church in prayer, reflection and struggle concerning God's

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[24] 24. Thomas F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 147.

[25] 25. Ibid., p. 135.

[26] 26. Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Truth and Life', in *Concilium* 21 (New York: Paulist Press, 1967), p. 90.

[27] 27. Gerald O'Collins, 'Dogma', in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 163. According to O'Collins, 'All dogmas are doctrines, albeit of a particularly solemn kind, but obviously not all doctrines have reached or ever will reach dogmatic status.'

[28] 28. Ibid., pp. 162–63. O'Collins here cites the Vatican II statement *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* 6.21.

mysteries: all these derive their life from the fact that they are not end but beginning, not goal but means, truths which open the way to the—ever greater—Truth.'[29]

As Catholic theologians come to recognize the relativity of dogmatic formulation and as Protestant theologians begin to sense the need for a confessional or dogmatic norm in theological work, there may be reason to hope for an emerging consensus on this important issue in the whole church. Yet there is also the sombre possibility that theology in its eagerness to come to terms with the new historical understanding spawned by the Enlightenment will lose sight of the irrevocable fact that there is an infallible standard transcending and governing history, that God's Word in the form of the gospel and the law is irreformable and irreversible, and that theological study and teaching therefore have an anchor in the transcendent, which cannot be ignored without irreparable harm to the thought and life of the church.

DIMENSIONS OF A RENEWED THEOLOGY

The kind of theology I advocate is a self-transcending theology, pointing beyond itself to Jesus Christ, to what God has done for us in Christ. It sees itself in the service of the church proclamation of the gospel.

Theologizing, I firmly believe, entails a personal relationship and acquaintance with Jesus Christ, involving a renewal of the mind and heart of the theologian. Theology presupposes regenerate theologians. It is to be done by those who have experienced the Holy Spirit as the interpreter of Scripture. As Luther discovered, 'theological knowledge is won by experiencing it'.[30]

I assert this against Schubert Ogden's extraordinary contention that 'even though faith without theology is not really faith at all, theology without faith is still theology, and quite possibly good theology at that'.[31] The crux of the matter is not whether the theologian accepts the answer of the witness of faith but whether he or she reflects on the question to which the answer is addressed. From my perspective, the pivotal question does not arise out of human experience but is itself a gift of revelation and therefore presupposes that the subject has already been grasped by revelation.

It is well to note that Calvin called his *Institutes* not a *summa theologiae* but a *summa pietatis* (a summary of piety). Indeed, according to John McNeill, the secret of Calvin's mental energy 'lies in his piety; its product is his theology, which is his piety described at length. His task is to expound ... "the whole sum of piety and whatever it is necessary to know in the doctrine of salvation" '.[32]

A renewed theology will be evangelical, that is, centred in the gospel of reconciliation and redemption as attested in Holy Scripture. It will serve the evangelical proclamation and will therefore have a pronounced missionary dimension.

It will also be catholic in the sense that it will be universal in its outreach and stand in continuity with the tradition of the whole church. It will draw on the theological commentary on Scripture in the church through the ages. The Reformers appealed not only to Scripture but also to the church fathers in support of their theses.

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[29] 29. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 1:149.

[30] 30. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 8. Note that these are the words of Althaus.

[31] 31. Ogden, *On Theology*, p. 19.

[32] 32. Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:li.

In addition, a renewed theology will be Reformed. First, it will be anchored in the Protestant Reformation. It will see the Reformation as the rediscovery of the New Testament gospel of salvation by free grace. Second, it will see itself as always being reformed in the light of the Word of God. Theology in this sense will be a *theologia viatorum* (a wayfarers' theology) or a *theologia in via* (a theology on the way). It will not be a *theologia beatorum* (a theology of the blessed) or a *theologia in visione* (a theology in vision). The theologian will humbly acknowledge that he or she has not yet arrived, that the absolute system, the final synthesis of all theses and antitheses, is the property only of God the Almighty.

This same attitude of dependence on the Lord will lead a renewed theology to be pentecostal, in the sense of being open to the new wind of the Spirit. But this is the Spirit never separated from the Word. Theology acknowledges that God has yet more light to break forth from his Holy Word (John Robinson, d. 1625). This new light, however, is not a new revelation—and certainly not a contradiction of what has gone before— but its amplification and clarification.

Finally, theology will earnestly strive to be orthodox. It will not be slavishly bound to the creedal formulations of the past, but it will respect them. It will make use of creeds in order to go beyond them to a new articulation of the faith that nevertheless stands in continuity with the old.

Theology at its best will be integrally related to practice. 'Knowledge of God', Barth pointed out, 'is not an escape into the safe heights of pure ideas, but an entry into the need of the present world, sharing in its suffering, its activity and its hope'.[33] The goal of theology is holiness in life and thought. The motto of liberation theology has much to commend it: 'No one can understand the gospel without the performance of the gospel'.[34] This is in accord with the words of the psalmist: 'A good understanding have all those who do His commandments' (Ps. 111:10 NKJ; cf. 1 Jn. 2:3–4; 4:7–8 JB). But we should not overlook the other side of the paradox—that knowledge of God has priority over action in the name of God (cf. Col. 1:9–10; 2 Jn. 9). It is not until we are awakened to the love of God poured out for us in Jesus Christ that we will be moved to do acts of love out of gratefulness for what God has done for us. It is only when we ourselves practise love that we are enabled to understand the full implications of the gift of faith.

A catholic evangelical theology will be characterized by a high view of Scripture, unabashedly holding to *sola Scriptura*, the watchword of the Reformation. This means not that Scripture is the only source of revelation but that it is the original and primary witness to revelation. Scripture therefore has primacy—over the church, religious experience and reason. Evangelical theology will take strong exception to Ogden's contention that 'the locus of the canon … cannot be the writings of the New Testament as such but can only be the earliest traditions of Christian witness accessible to us today by historical-critical analysis of these writings'.[35] It will firmly resist the call of Rosemary Ruether for a new canon that would widen the Scriptures of the church to include Gnostic

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[33] 33. Quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), p. 100.

[34] 34. From a lecture by M. Douglas Meeks of Wesley Seminary, Washington, D.C., given at St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Chicago, May 4, 1980.

[35] 35. Ogden, *On Theology*, p. 64.

writings and literature of goddess spirituality.[36] It will affirm with the church father Jerome that 'the bulwark of the Church is that man who is well grounded in Scripture'.[37]

Another hallmark of a catholic evangelical theology is its high view of God. The God of theology will *eo ipso* be the God of Scripture, the sovereign Creator and Redeemer of the world. It will not be the finite God of process philosophy (Whitehead) and philosophical personalism (Brightman) but the personal-infinite God attested in the Bible (Francis Schaeffer). This God is not only Saviour of humankind but Lord of everything that exists.

With full confidence in the power and mercy of God, evangelical theology will uphold the Reformation principle of the sovereignty of grace. Grace not only saves but also rules. We are not only justified by grace but also kept by grace. Yet grace works not apart from human action but in and through human action. Grace realizes its goal in human life through the cooperation that it itself makes possible. A religion of grace will always be arrayed against a religion of works-righteousness. Christianity is not legalism or moralism but the story of the triumph of grace in the lives of sinful human beings.

Paradoxically, the evangelical theologian will have a high view of humanity, agreeing with Irenaeus that 'the glory of God is man fully alive'. Humanity is not reduced to nothingness by grace but instead elevated into fellowship with divinity. God's grace does not denigrate the human but sanctifies and restores it to its true purpose.

A catholic evangelical theology will have in addition a high view of the church, not hesitating to call the church 'our holy mother' (as Calvin did). The church represents the feminine side of the sacred, the bride of Christ, who cleaves to the One who lays down his life for her (Eph. 5:21–33). We are conceived in the womb of the church and nurtured by the tender love of this holy mother. The church is a sacrament of the grace of God in Christ, a visible sign of the invisible grace that is sealed in our hearts by the Spirit of God.

Finally, evangelical theology will be grounded in a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Theologizing is valid only when done by those who trust in the grace of Christ for their wisdom and who are motivated by the desire to give glory to God in Christ.

Theology in the sense intended here is more than descriptive. It is also prescriptive, for it presents the truth of faith as normative for all human endeavour. Its task is to clarify and interpret the divine dogma communicated to the church by the Spirit. Its purpose is to serve the church proclamation, the heralding of the good news that we are saved only by grace through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world.

THE TWO SIDES OF THEOLOGY

Theology has two sides: the dogmatic and the apologetic. Its mandate is to combat misunderstandings of the faith (polemics and apologetics) and to articulate the true understanding (dogmatics). Apologetics is the conscious endeavour to answer criticisms from the world outside the church. Polemics is the systematic effort to counter misunderstandings within the family of faith.

Apologetics is not the preamble to dogmatics but an activity within dogmatics. The best defence of the faith consists in expounding the message of faith in love. The self-attesting Scripture, not the new world consciousness, is the point of departure for evangelical theology. In other words, the substance of the faith takes priority over the evidence of faith.

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[36] 36. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1985), pp. ix–xi. Also see Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), pp. 38–41.

[37] 37. Cited in *Presbyterian Journal* 31, no. 50 (Apr. 11, 1973):13.

The evangelical theologian does not blithely proceed to correlate the creative questions of the culture and the answer of faith (as in Tillichian apologetics). Instead, we are challenged to lead people to ask the right questions, questions that are hidden from sinful humanity until the moment of revelation. We seek neither a correlation of the gospel with secular thought nor a synthesis of the gospel with secular thought but a confrontation of secular claims by the truth of the gospel.

Theology exists to serve the proclamation of the church. It will therefore be a kerygmatic theology, focusing on the message of faith. But it will also have a prophetic dimension, endeavouring to bring the law of God to bear upon both personal and social sin. Finally, it will have an apologetic dimension, for it will make a determined effort to unmask the powers of the world that challenge and attack the church. Yet in fulfilling its apologetic mandate it will not presume that arguments for the faith can ever induce faith in unbelievers, for faith comes only by the hearing of the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). At the same time, it nurtures the hope that as it defends the claims of faith before both church and world it might in the process kindle within unbelievers a curiosity regarding these claims that could be used by the Spirit to lead them into a situation where they might be ready to hear the gospel message.

The method of a theology of revelation is faith seeking understanding (Augustine, Anselm). Reason is not the springboard to revelation nor its foundation but its servant in making the truth of revelation clear both to the church and the world. Our task as theologians of the church is to preach not a bifurcated or private gospel but the whole gospel. We are enjoined to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord of all of life (Francis Schaeffer). This means we will proclaim not simply the message of salvation but the divine commandment that calls for a dramatic reordering of the life of society and of personal life.

Theology as an agency in the renewal of the church strives for a balance of doctrine, life, experience and worship. Doctrine is important, but it becomes lifeless apart from the experience of the Spirit, the life of obedience and the adoration of the true God in prayer and thanksgiving. Philip Spener rightly depicted theology as not a mere science but a *habitus practicus* (a way of life).[38] Theology is integrally related to the trials and pitfalls of life as well as to its joys and hopes. As Luther observed with characteristic forthrightness, 'One becomes a theologian by experiencing death and damnation, not by understanding, reading, and speculating'.[39]

The emphasis today is on *praxis* over logos and *doxa* (worship) over dogma. This is a sorely needed corrective to the lifeless orthodoxy that has been more constricting than liberating. Yet the corrective itself is liable to create a new imbalance. We must not overlook the perennial need for sound doctrine in the church. Here we see the relevance of the Pastoral Epistles, which urge us to remain true to the faith once delivered to the saints (cf. 1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 3:16; Tit. 1:9; 2:7, 10). In the current pluralistic climate we should take to heart this Johannine admonition: 'Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son' (2 Jn. 9).

The more we emphasize *praxis*, the more we run the risk of losing sight of both the propositional and historical dimensions of revelation. Theology has to do with both the

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[38] 38. Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), pp. 103–15.

[39] 39. See Jared Wicks, *Luther and His Spiritual Legacy* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983), p. 89. Cf.: 'The true contemplation is that in which the heart is crushed and the conscience smitten.' *Luther's Meditations on the Gospels*, ed. and trans. Roland H. Bainton (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 135.

living of the Christian life and the knowledge of the true God, of his plan and purpose for the world. Neglect of the latter can only leave us vulnerable to the allurements of the New Age mentality that encourages a counterfeit spirituality.

Theology is an intelligible and articulate explication of the message of Scripture on the basis of an experience of the Lord of Scripture for the purpose of greater obedience to him. This explication entails not only affirming the truth of the gospel but also exposing the untruth that subverts or ignores the gospel. To say yes to Jesus Christ is to say no to the spirit of the antichrist. The ability to say yes has its basis in the illumination and empowering of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). The resolve to say no has this same source, for the discernment and power to resist untruth come from divine grace, not from natural human   sagacity.

THE CHALLENGE TODAY

In order to reaffirm orthodoxy we need first to rediscover heresy. Orthodoxy indeed emerges when the church struggles to reclaim the faith in the face of its distortions and misinterpretations. This is not an undertaking for the fainthearted. With his usual perspicacity Luther realized, 'If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not professing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ!'[40]

Heresy signifies a palpable imbalance in the interpretation of the faith so that certain truths are ignored or downplayed. It may also indicate an aberration that strikes at the vitals of the faith. In the first sense it is probably more accurately described as heterodoxy.

Schleiermacher was one of the first modern theologians who tried to take heresy seriously (which did not prevent him from fostering it himself). He saw basically four types of heresy: the docetic and ebionitic, which refer to misunderstandings of the person of Christ; and the Manichaean and Pelagian, which represent misapprehensions in the realm of soteriology.[41] While his analysis has much to commend it, it is woefully inadequate in confronting such perversions of the faith as 'German Christianity' and apartheid. Schleiermacher could justly be accused of promoting the heresy of unionism— seeking Christian unity at the price of letting go of doctrinal particularity.[42] The problem arises from a false irencism in which love is elevated over truth.

Subjectivism is another theological aberration that wreaks havoc in the church, and Schleiermacher's influence is discernible here also. In this misunderstanding, autonomous human reason or experience becomes the determinant for Christian thinking and practice. Thus Gregory Baum denies that the Christian message gives us information about the divine to be rationally assimilated. Instead, it is salvational truth that raises human consciousness and enables one to see the world in a new light.[43] According to Langdon Gilkey, 'authority for all of us has no locus except here in this world, in present

[40] 40. Cited by Marshall Shelley, review of *Bring Forth Justice* by Waldron Scott, *Christianity Today* 25, no. 11 (June 12, 1981):62.

[41] 41. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 1:97–101.

[42] 42. Schleiermacher fervently supported the creation of the Prussian Union Church by Frederick William III in which Lutheran and Reformed distinctives were sacrificed for the purpose of a pan-Protestant church.

[43] 43. Gregory Baum, foreword to Andre M. Greely, *The Ne Agenda* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 16.

experience; and consequently the authorities we recognize must be generated out of experience itself'.[44]

The opposite error is objectivism, in which the human mind is called to submit to a purely external authority. Kant aptly referred to this as the peril of heteronomy. We find objectivism in sacramentalism, creedalism and ecclesiasticism, in which the confession of faith or the church is made the final criterion for life and thought. The shadow of heteronomy clouds the vision of Max Thurian, erstwhile theologian of the Taizé community: 'We have no better access to the truth contained in Sacred Scriptures and believed in by the whole Church than the trinitarian and Christological dogmas of the first councils. … *Theological science is composed of exegesis and of submission to the faith of the councils'.*[45]

Another seedbed of heresy is eclecticism, which draws from various traditions, often conflicting and disparate. The search for a global religion that would in effect supplant institutional Christianity was already noticeable in Schleiermacher, and it has reappeared in Paul Tillich, John Hick and Rosemary Ruether, among others. Ruether is unabashedly eclectic when she says, 'The search for usable tradition may widen to pre-Christian, non-Christian, and post-Christian traditions, not simply over against the biblical and Christian traditions, but as a way of placing it in a larger context, which complements and corrects its biases'.[46]

Closely related to eclecticism are latitudinarianism and pluralism: here any exclusive or particular claim to truth is frowned upon as a sign of provincialism and fanaticism. Schleiermacher prepared the way for the new mentality: 'Let none offer the seekers a system making exclusive claim to truth, but let each man offer his characteristic, individual presentation'.[47] He and those who followed in his steps failed to perceive the fanaticism inherent in such a position.

Christians, of course, should acknowledge the pluralism of the modern age in which various religions and ideologies coexist in mutual and sometimes creative tension, but we cannot under any circumstances surrender our claim to a definitive revelation. There can be a relative pluralism in theology, which seeks to interpret the faith for every age, but not in dogma, which is the doctrinal foundation of faith. We are free to elaborate the doctrinal or dogmatic substance of the faith, but we are not free to discard or ignore its core meaning. Dogma is irreformable, but theology must be constantly reformed in the light from almighty God given in Holy Scripture.

The opposite error of eclecticism and latitudinarianism is sectarianism —unduly narrowing the range of Christian experience and elevating marginal doctrines into dogmas. When belief in the premillennial reign of Christ or the pretribulation rapture of the saints becomes part of the message of the gospel, we are trapped in a dangerously sectarian mindset. Sectarianism is the identification of a particular church with the holy catholic church or a particular theology with the wisdom of God. Just as liberals gravitate to eclecticism and latitudinarianism, so conservatives veer in a sectarian direction. Evangelicals and fundamentalists are notorious for majoring in minors.

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[44] 44. Gilkey, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity*, pp. 65–66

[45] 45. Max Thurian, *Visible Unity and Tradition*, trans. W.J. Kerrigan (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), pp. 30, 32. Thurian has since converted to the Roman Catholic church and has left the Taizé community.

[46] 46. Rosemary Reuther, 'Theology as Critique of and Emancipation from Sexism', in *The Vocation of the Theologian*, ed. Theodore Jennings, Jr. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 30.

[47] 47. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. Oman, p. 175.

The primary task of the theologian today is not, as Langdon Gilkey says, 'the revision of the Christian message in contemporary terms'[48] in accord with the prevailing philosophies of the culture, but the reaffirmation of a catholic evangelical theology, which celebrates biblical faith kept alive in the universal tradition of the whole church. To this end we must have a faithful rendition of the Christian message both in the language of Canaan and in the language of our day. Nor can we accept with Schubert Ogden that 'the ultimate criteria for the truth of any claim can only be our common human experience and reason, however hard their verdict may be to determine'.[49] Our ultimate standard must be the gospel of God that brings all human experience and cultural values into radical question.

In some circles today it is fashionable to speak of theology as describing a particular tradition rather than presenting a normative claim to truth competing with other claims. Doctrines, George Lindbeck suggests, specify rules for Christian speech and action rather than norms that have a basis in ultimate reality. But theology is not simply descriptive but also combative. It must expose error in thinking and must call for a decision for the truth. It seeks to persuade as well as to expound, yet basing its appeal not on its own logic but on the metalogic of the cross of Christ, which drives reason beyond itself. Theology does not merely explicate the doctrines of faith for the sake of coherence and meaningfulness but also presents its doctrines as truth claims calling for decision.

With the rise of narrative theology, the emphasis has shifted from exploring the metaphysical implications of the faith to investigating the story of a people on pilgrimage. While reflecting certain biblical concerns, this development is nonetheless fraught with peril. Theology can ill afford to ignore the issue of truth, for it is truth that gives narrative its significance. Revelation brings us not only insight into the human condition but also foresight into the divine plan for the world. The divine incursion into history sets the stage for an excursus in ontology. Theology is certainly more than a generalized description of the faith of the community: it entails a metaphysical probing of how this community is grounded in reality.[50] Christianity is not a religion in search of a metaphysic (as Whitehead erroneously believed);[51] it is a faith that has its own metaphysic, but one that needs to be developed over against the illusory speculations of a humanity that has declared its independence from God.

The overall aim in this kind of exploration is not conceptual mastery or comprehensive understanding but a faithful rendition of the truth-content of divine revelation as this pertains to the whole of reality. Theology is not to seek a place in the sun at the expense of philosophy but to aspire to give all praise to God's glory, humbly recognizing that the perfect or fulfilled system of thought lies only in the mind of God. Our little systems are at the most imperfect reflections and approximations of the absolute system that God alone possesses. Theology's task is to set up signs and parables that point to the perfect wisdom of God, which for the church is an eschatological hope rather than a realized possibility.

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[48] 48. Langdon Gilkey, 'Theology as the Interpretation of Faith for Church and World', in *The Vocation of the Theologian*, ed. Jennings, p. 97.

[49] 49. Ogden, *On Theology*, p. 140.

[50] 50. I affirm this against Thiemann, whose doctrine of revelation is 'not a foundational epistemological theory but an account which traces the internal logic of a set of Christian convictions concerning God's identity and reality'. Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 70. Unlike some other narrative theologians, Thiemann contrasts 'descriptive' with 'explanatory' rather than with 'normative'.

[51] 51. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 50.

A VENTURE IN OBEDIENCE

Theology is a venture in obedience before it is a search for deeper understanding—either of divinity or of humanity. We seek to understand in order to be fit instruments for service in God's kingdom. In our obedience we will try to build bridges of understanding but also tear down bridges that can only lead to greater misunderstanding. We will be messengers of hope but also prophets of gloom, for our task is to announce the divine judgment on human sin as well as the gospel of God's grace.

In our theological endeavour we have models from the past to guide us. For Luther theology was essentially a battle (*Kampf*), whereas for Thomas Aquinas it was primarily wisdom (*sapientia*). This accounts for the often erratic character of Luther's writings and the well-balanced but somewhat boring character of Thomas's works. Yet we need both: rational coherence and the sharpness of polemical combat. Both Luther and Aquinas employed rational analysis and polemical argument, though not to the same degree. Both sought to maintain the mystery and paradox in revelation. This is more evident in the former, but Aquinas too maintained that the truth of faith, though intelligible, is incomprehensible. Both would concur with the apostle Paul: 'Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face' ([1 Cor. 13:12](#)).

Theology is not a *game* in which we share insights or discoveries about ultimate reality in order to gain intellectual stimulation or deeper self-understanding, for this would make it into a sophisticated kind of psychology. Nor is it essentially a *quest* for wisdom, for then it would become just another philosophy. Nor is it basically a *battle* against false belief, for this would reduce it to polemics.[52]

Instead, theology is essentially a *witness* that takes the form of faithful reflection on the truth revealed by God in a particular time and place in history for the purpose of equipping the church in its apostolic task of preaching and teaching. As a witness to the truth revealed by God it will involve exposing falsifications of this truth as well as striving to understand the ramifications of this truth for every aspect of experience.

Theology will include the dimensions of battle and wisdom, but it will exclude any attempt to construe it as simply an intellectual exercise. When theology becomes a game it is bereft of serious commitment and even of serious content. The bona fide theologian will recognize that we have to say an irrevocable no to some beliefs and an equally irrevocable yes to others. We must be charitable but at the same time resolute in our fidelity to the gospel.

Likewise, theology must not be reduced to a phenomenological description of religious experience or of human existence. It is on the contrary an announcement of the good news that a Saviour has come into the world who not only promises deliverance to a people enslaved by the powers of darkness but also who aspires to be Lord of all creation. Theology is *reflection* on the meaning and impact of God's intervention in human history but for the purpose of *obedience* to this God as Lord of the universe.

Evangelical theology of the kind I am proposing will be characterized by humility. The theologian will be fully cognizant of the fact that human thoughts are not the same as the thoughts and ways of God and may be a very inadequate way of expressing the truth revealed by God. Thomas Aquinas sardonically commented on his own theology shortly before his death: 'It reminds me of straw.' Karl Barth wryly followed suit: 'The angels will laugh when they read my theology.'

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[52] 52. Brunner errs in this direction when he says: 'This fight with modern thinking is the task, supremely, of theology; and since it is a fight more critical than any other the Church has to wage, the responsibilities of theology are now perhaps greater than ever before.' Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 6.

A theology rooted in the gospel will also be imbued with the spirit of love. We are obliged always to speak the truth in love. As Thomas Aquinas wisely admonished, 'We must love them both, those whose opinions we share and those whose opinions we reject. For both have labored in the search for truth, and both have helped us in finding it.'[53]

Finally, evangelical theology will be noted for its daring. It will seek to witness to the truth of God with boldness and resolution, undeterred by pressures from the world. Indeed, holy boldness can be said to be the salient mark of great theology. Yet this boldness must be informed by wisdom, love and humility.

Theology at its best will be a venture of daring love born out of fidelity to the Great Commission to share the gospel with all peoples. It will not try to impose its claims or impress the world with its superior wisdom. It will seek only to serve the incarnate Word of God, its Lord and Master, by announcing the coming of his kingdom with its promise of liberation and transformation for the world.

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Revisioning the Theological Task

Stanley J. Grenz

Every Christian is a theologian. Whether consciously or unconsciously, each person of faith embraces a belief system. And each believer, whether deliberately or merely implicitly, reflects on the content of these beliefs and their significance for Christian life. The close connection between being a Christian and theological reflection arises from the New Testament itself. The biblical documents invite the faith community to think through their beliefs in order to understand why these are a part of personal and corporate commitment (e.g., Mt. 22:37; 2 Cor. 10:5; 1 Pet. 3:15). Theology seeks to facilitate this conscious reflection on faith. Therefore, the enterprise is to be neither feared nor despised, but rather welcomed, because of its important function within the life of discipleship.

We have asserted that the ethos of evangelicalism is a shared experience understood in terms of shared categories, a piety cradled in a theology. But what theology can assist us as evangelicals in our attempt to reflect on the faith we share?

Despite the orientation toward spirituality characteristic of the movement as a whole, contemporary evangelical thinkers generally engage in the theological task with eyes

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[53] 53. Cited in *The Catholic Worker* 46, no. 6 (July–Aug. 1980):8.

focused on epistemology or the cognitive dimension of faith, rather than toward our shared piety. Evangelical theology tends to move from the conviction that there is a deposit of cognitive revelation given once and for all in the Bible. In fact, evangelical theologians sometimes locate the genius of the movement in the combination of a material and a formal principle.[1] The material principle or content of evangelicalism encompasses the basic doctrines of the Bible, whereas the formative principle is loyalty to the Bible as the completely true and trustworthy, final and authoritative source of all doctrine. As a result, many evangelicals view the task of theology primarily as systematizing and articulating the body of doctrine they assume to preexist implicitly or explicitly in Scripture.

Klaus Bockmuehl speaks for evangelical theologians in general in declaring that the task of systematic theology 'is to produce a summary of Christian doctrine, an ordered summary or synopsis of the themes of teaching in Holy Scripture. We are to collect the different, dispersed propositions on essential themes or topics of the OT and the NT and put them together in an order that fits the subject-matter in hand'.[2]

Although it rightly seeks to uphold the authority of the Bible, this approach cannot serve as a catalyst for a revisioned evangelical theology. To understand this assertion, we must begin historically. We must first look at the development of theology in general and the modern evangelical propositionalism in particular. Only then can we move on to reformulate the task of an adequate evangelical theology.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY

The word *theology* does not appear in the biblical documents. Rather, the term originates from ancient Greece. The word is a compilation from two other Greek terms, *theos* (God) and *logos* (word, teaching, study), and therefore etymologically *theology* means 'the teaching concerning, or the study of, God'. The Greeks used the term to refer to the sayings of the philosophers and poets concerning divine matters, generally viewed within the framework of knowledge of humanity and nature.[3]

The Greek theological task was imported into Christian tradition early, perhaps as early as Paul's encounter with the philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16–31), but at least by the time of the second-century Christian apologists. As late as the early Middle Ages the Greek understanding of the enterprise remained influential among Christian thinkers. They understood *theology* generally as referring to the doctrine of God, which they regarded as one topic within the broader study of dogmatics or sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*).[4]

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[1] 1. E.g., the statement produced by the 1989 consultation on Evangelical Affirmations cosponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School as published in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 37–38. See also Kenneth S. Kantzer, 'Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith', in *The Evangelicals*, ed. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 59, 73.

[2] 2. Klaus Bockmuehl, 'The Task of Systematic Theology', in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 4.

[3] 3. For this latter point, see Frank Whaling, 'The Development of the Word "Theology" ', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981):292–93.

[4] 4. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 89.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, *theology* underwent a change in meaning—from the discourse on God to the rational explication of revelation.[5] With the rise of the universities, the enterprise was destined to become an academic as well as an ecclesiastical discipline.[6] And the term came to refer to a single, unified 'science' focusing on knowledge of God and having the primary character of wisdom.[7]

In eighteenth-century Germany the understanding of theology shifted again. Christian thinkers replaced the concept of a unified, practical science with the multiplicity of the theological sciences.[8] Thereby they transformed *theology* into an all-inclusive word referring to the various aspects of the study of the Bible and the church. At the same time, Christians were growing increasingly aware that the world contained a number of separate religious traditions, each with its own understanding of the divine reality. Consequently, the term came to refer to the account of God in the various religions.[9]

Today Christians generally use *theology* in a slightly narrower manner, interchangeable with what earlier thinkers termed *dogmatics*. In North America, however, this word has been replaced by 'systematic theology', or more recently, 'constructive' or 'doctrinal theology'.

Whatever the term used, the theological task encompasses the intellectual reflection on faith. Theology explores a specific religious belief system itself (doctrine). But it also focuses on the nature of believing and the integration of commitment with personal and community life. Christian theology, therefore, seeks to delineate a coherent presentation of the themes of Christian faith, which traditionally include God, human existence and the created universe, the identity of Jesus as the Christ and the salvation he brought, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work in the world, the church as the community expression of Christian faith, and the consummation of God's programme for creation.

In the broad sense, then, we may define systematic theology as the intellectual reflection on the act, and the attempt to articulate the content, of Christian faith, including its expression in beliefs, practices and institutions.

The systematic-theological task did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, Christian theology is the product of the presence in the church of three perceived needs—polemics, catechetics and biblical summarization.[10] These factors were already visible in the early centuries of the Christian era, and in some form they continue to command attention in the church today.

The theological task grows out of the need in the church to define the Christian belief system. This intention was prominent in the early Christian centuries, when the church was faced with doctrinal controversies. Theological formulations constituted one significant aspect in the struggle to differentiate orthodoxy from heterodox views (heresy). The polemical factor was again of special importance during the Reformation era. In the face of differences over questions of faith, the various church bodies marked

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[5] 5. Yves M.J. Congar, *A History of Theology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), p. 33. See also G.R. Evans, *The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

[6] 6. Whaling, 'The Development of the Word "Theology" ', p. 300.

[7] 7. Edward Farley, *Theologia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 77, 81.

[8] 8. Ibid., pp. 49, 65, 77.

[9] 9. Whaling, 'The Development of the Word "Theology" ', pp. 305–6.

[10] 10. See Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 93–96. Congar cites the church's need to speak to the pagan culture and the individual believer's need to reflect on faith in the pagan context. Congar, *A History of Theology*, pp. 39–40.

out their theological positions in order to define their own particular understanding of Christianity. In the modern era, the context of polemics has shifted, as Christians now sense the need to delineate the nature of their faith in the midst of many competing worldviews and religions.

The Christian theological enterprise is an outworking of the need to offer instruction to the people of God. Teaching the faith is especially important in the case of new converts, who must be instructed in the fundamentals of Christianity in order to become mature believers. To facilitate the task of teaching the many converts coming from pagan backgrounds, second-century Christian leaders developed church catechisms, which were by necessity theological in orientation. Although styles have changed, the church has continued to use theology in the fulfilling of its pedagogical mandate.

Christians have always desired to bring the basic themes and teachings of the Bible into summary form. In fact, this summarizing tendency is found already in the writings of the Bible. In the Old Testament era the Hebrew people summarized the understanding of the divine nature that arose out of their experience of God (e.g., Deut. 6:4–5; 26:5–9). The New Testament likewise contains summary statements concerning topics such as the nature of salvation and the person of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3–8; Phil. 2:6–11; 1 Tim. 3:16). Traditionally, systematic theology has sought to bring together in systematic fashion the major biblical themes of God's gracious salvation.

EVANGELICAL PROPOSITIONALISM

As this quick survey suggests, theology as the summarization of biblical doctrine sports an impeccable pedigree within theological history. Yet the specific expression of this task among evangelicals is a relatively recent development. Many evangelical theologians elevate biblical summarization, seeing it as their central, if not sole, task, and coupling the focus on this endeavour with modern concepts of the nature of science.

Conservative theologians, whether Calvinist, dispensational, Wesleyan or Arminian, fall into step with the assumption that theology is 'the science of God' based on the Bible. Just as the natural world is amenable to the scientist's probings, they argue, so also the teaching of Scripture is objectively understandable. Systematic theology organizes the 'facts' of Scripture, just as the natural sciences systematize the facts of nature. Consequently, the correct theology is a crystallization of biblical truth into a set of universally true and applicable propositions.[11]

Because it champions scientific thinking, the empirical approach and common sense, George Marsden classifies evangelical theology as 'early modern'.[12] This characterization is surely correct. The understanding of truth and of the task of the theological discipline that characterizes much of contemporary evangelicalism predates the rise of the mid-twentieth-century coalition, having been mediated to us by the influence of the Princeton theology of the nineteenth century on the fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth. The Princeton theology had itself accepted the legacy of the older Protestant scholasticism, especially in its Reformed variety.

A theologian who is often connected with Reformed scholasticism and who through his link to the Princeton thinkers has exercised great influence on evangelicalism is

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[11] 11. This feature of evangelical theology is noted by David F. Wells, 'An American Evangelical Theology: The Painful Transition from Theoria to Praxis', in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 86.

[12] 12. George M. Marsden, 'Evangelical, History and Modernity', in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, p. 98.

Francis Turretin (1623–87). According to Turretin, the purpose of theology is to teach savingly of God.[13] To this salvific end, however, natural revelation is insufficient. Rather than being the compilation of truth disclosed in creation and discovered by reason, for Turretin theology is primarily the systematization of the teachings of Scripture,[14] and the object of theology is God as he has revealed himself in his Word.[15] Turretin's theology was likewise oriented toward propositional truth. As Richard Muller concludes, the scholasticism of the seventeenth-century Reformed thinker was an outworking of 'the desire to forge a theological orthodoxy, a system of "right-doctrine" '.[16] Turretin's legacy lies in this basic approach to theology with which his later disciples were imbued.

The approach to the task of theology set forth by Turretin was perfected by the nineteenth-century Princeton theologians. These thinkers accepted the responsibility for articulating Calvinist orthodoxy, given their perception that the older theology had been rendered 'so harmless that it was no longer worth believing'.[17]

Although it included a pietistic strand, nineteenth-century Presbyterianism clearly emphasized biblical doctrine and the systematizing approach to the Bible influenced by the scientific paradigm of the day. Hence Charles Hodge could offer this typical comparison between science and theology:

> If natural science be concerned with the facts and laws of nature, theology is concerned with facts and principles of the Bible. If the object of the one be to arrange and systematize the facts of the external world, and to ascertain the laws by which they are determined; the object of the other is to systematize the facts of the Bible, and ascertain the principles or general truths which those facts provide.[18]

In their doctrinal orientation the Princeton theologians were fiercely loyal to the Westminster Confession, which they believed represented the Bible's own system as closely as was humanly possible.

In keeping with the emphasis on biblical doctrine, the Princeton theology elevated the propositional and unchanging nature of truth. In the characterization of Marsden, 'Truth was a stable entity, not historically relative, best expressed in written language that, at least potentially, would convey one message in all times and places'.[19] Hence, rather than anchoring theology in a cultural context, the Princeton thinkers sought to emancipate it from such a context, and thereby to produce a statement of truth that would be timeless and culture-free.[20] It is within this context that we are to understand Hodge's claim that during his tenure at Princeton no new idea had emerged.[21] The Princeton Presbyterians

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[13] 13. Richard A. Muller, 'Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic: Francis Turretin on the Object and Principles of Theology', *Church History*, 55 (June 1986):204.

[14] 14. Franciscus Turrettinus, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Geneva, 1677–85; rpt. Edinburgh, 1847), 1. 2. 6–7, as cited by Muller, 'Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic', p. 204.

[15] 15. Turrettinus, *Institutio* 1. 5. 4; cited in Muller, 'Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic', p. 200.

[16] 16. Muller, 'Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic', p. 205.

[17] 17. Wells, 'An American Evangelical Theology', p. 85.

[18] 18. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:18.

[19] 19. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 110.

[20] 20. Wells, 'An American Evangelical Theology', p. 85.

[21] 21. Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. xv.

were intent on discovering and bequeathing to the church the timeless doctrinal theology found within the Bible.

The heirs of Turretin and the Princeton theologians in the evangelical tradition have generally followed the lead of their mentors in elevating biblical systematization and emphasizing the propositional nature of theological statements. Among the proponents of this biblically focused, evangelical propositionalism none has been more untiring than Carl F.H. Henry, hailed as the most prominent evangelical theologian of the second half of the twentieth century. Even without writing a systematic theology, Henry has left his mark on evangelicalism by providing the theoretical foundations for the propositionalist understanding of the theological enterprise.

One central passion of Henry's life has been the attempt to set forth the foundations for a truly valid theology. Only a return to the basic evangelical perspective can solve the current difficulty in theology, he believes. And in his understanding this basic evangelical perspective asserts that the foundation for theology can be nothing other than the revelation of God as deposited in the Scriptures.[22] Early in his tenure as founding editor of *Christianity Today*, Henry lamented 'the compromise of the authority of the Bible' noticeable in mainstream Protestantism and the 'surrender of scriptural perspectives to modern critical speculations' which have led to 'doubts over historical and propositional revelation, plenary inspiration, and verbal inerrancy'.[23] As a result, Henry devoted himself to the defence of these dimensions of the conservative doctrine of Scripture.

The emphasis on revelation is not uniquely his, of course. But what sets Henry's brand of evangelicalism apart from other twentieth-century articulators is his understanding of the nature of revelation. According to Henry, revelation means that God has both acted in history and spoken to humankind. God's speaking is crucial to God's acting, he argues, for it provides the rationale and meaning of the divine historical acts.[24] Through God's interpretation God's activity gains meaning for us.[25] In keeping with this emphasis, Henry defines revelation as 'that activity of the supernatural God whereby he communicates information essential for man's present and future destiny. In revelation God, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, shares his mind; he communicates not only the truth about himself and his intentions, but also that concerning man's present plight and future prospects'.[26]

For Henry, revelation's spoken nature means that in an important way it is rational and hence propositional. In his magnum opus, the six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority*, he goes to great lengths to develop the thesis that 'God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form'.[27] He agrees with the modern emphasis on the functional, dynamic and teleological dimensions of revelation, but argues that these cannot be separated from the propositional. For him, the reality that God has spoken means that the

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[22] 22. For an early statement of this theme, see Carl F.H. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma: An Analysis of the Current Impasse in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 225.

[23] 23. Carl F.H. Henry, *Frontiers in Modern Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 134–35.

[24] 24. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, pp. 95–96.

[25] 25. Ibid., p. 217.

[26] 26. Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), 3:457.

[27] 27. Ibid., 3:248–487.

intellect plays an integral role in the revelatory process.[28] Revelation, in other words, is objective,[29] conceptual,[30] intelligible and coherent.[31] Therefore Christianity, rather than being an escape from rationality, is oriented toward the intellect.[32]

Lying behind the rational character of the Christian faith Henry finds 'the rational living God'[33] who 'addresses man in his Word'.[34] The Christian revelation, therefore, is 'rationally consistent and compelling', for 'rationality has its very basis in the nature of the Living God'.[35] The concepts of revelation, reason and Scripture coalesce in Henry's basic epistemological axiom:

> Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.[36]

The emphasis on the propositional dimension of revelation so prominent in Henry's thought finds its supplement in his anthropology. In keeping with the rationalist tradition in theology, Henry elevates reason to the status of being the foundational dimension of the human person—a view, he argues, that was universally held prior to the modern era.[37] In fact, he finds in the biblical concept of the image of God the explanation for the phenomenon of divine revelation.[38] Despite the Fall, this divine image (which Henry views as including a certain knowledge of God, rational competence and ethical accountability) was present in some measure in every human being.[39]

Although acknowledging the presence of the divine image in everyone and the doctrinal importance of general revelation,[40] Henry argues that theology can be based only on the self-disclosure of God found in the Bible. In this way, he sets himself apart from evangelical 'evidentialists', those apologists who seek to ground Christian faith on arguments from reason and empirical evidence. Henry follows the 'presuppositionalist'

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[28] 28. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, p. 97.

[29] 29. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:426.

[30] 30. Ibid., 3:173.

[31] 31. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, p. 99.

[32] 32. Carl F.H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1946), p. 213.

[33] 33. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:244.

[34] 34. Ibid., 1:199.

[35] 35. Carl F.H. Henry, 'The Fortunes of Theology, Part 3', *Christianity Today* 16 (June 9, 1972):30 [874].

[36] 36. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:215.

[37] 37. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind*, p. 247.

[38] 38. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:394.

[39] 39. Ibid., 1:405; 2:136.

[40] 40. Ibid., 2:83–85.

approach,[41] basing all theology solely on the presupposition of the truthfulness of the Bible,[42] which he understands as presenting the truth of God in propositional form.

All evangelicals owe a debt of gratitude to Carl Henry. His erudition as a defender of biblical authority in the modern world is unquestioned. His mammoth *God, Revelation and Authority* has set both a standard and an agenda for younger evangelical theologians. Above all, his restatement of the classical concordance model of theology may be lauded and debated long after his departure from the theological scene.

Despite its uncontestable importance to evangelicalism, the 'concordance' model of systematic theology implicit in Turretin, propounded by Hodge and developed into evangelical propositionalism by thinkers such as Henry has not been without its detractors. In one sense, the entire thrust of modern theology since Schleiermacher has sought to provide a viable alternative to the tradition out of which propositionalism developed—the focus on authoritatively communicated truths— without opting for its Enlightenment alternative, which elevated the quest for truths gained through the speculative reason.[43]

More devastating than the implicit critique levelled by the developing liberal tradition, however, was that of twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy. The repeated outcry of neo-orthodox thinkers has been that revelation does not disclose supernatural knowledge—a body of propositions about God. Rather, in revelation, God himself encounters the human person.[44]

Evangelical theologians have rightly responded to the critique of neo-orthodoxy by refusing to acknowledge the disjunction between propositional and personal revelation.[45] Revelation, they argue, is both. While acknowledging that neo-orthodoxy is correct in asserting that what God primarily does is reveal himself, evangelicals add that God does so at least in part by telling us something about himself. And this *something* takes the form of propositions.

In spite of helpful responses such as these, the challenges posed by non-evangelical critics have led certain evangelical thinkers in recent years to grow uneasy with the older view.

Some voices within the movement have called for only minor refinements. Ronald Nash, for example, advocates a mere cosmetic, terminological change. Noting that the label 'propositional revelation' was probably not coined by evangelicals, he finds no 'sentimental reason' for continuing to use it. 'Instead of an alliterative formula', he writes, 'evangelicals should simply insist that some revelatory acts have a cognitive or informational character, and that this revealed truth is inscripturated in the several different literary forms found in the Bible'.[46]

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[41] 41. For a lengthier discussion of this label and its significance in Henry's thought, see Bob E. Patterson, *Carl F.H. Henry* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), pp. 58–83.

[42] 42. Henry lays down the thesis that the Bible is the sole foundation for theology in *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:181–409.

[43] 43. See, for example, the characterization of John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 12.

[44] 44. Ibid., pp. 27–40.

[45] 45. See, for example, Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983), 1:196.

[46] 46. Ronald H. Nash, 'Truth by Any Other Name', *Christianity Today* 22 (October 7, 1977):23.

More germane is the critique articulated by John Jefferson Davis. He reflects the opinion of many when he faults the older evangelical approach for not taking 'adequate account of the social context of the theological task and the historicity of all theological reflection'. Davis claims that this approach 'tends to promote a repetition of traditional formulations of biblical doctrine, rather than appropriate recontextualizations of the doctrines in response to changing cultural and historical conditions'.[47]

In keeping with this concern, an entire cadre of evangelical theologians are now urging each other to contextualize their theology.[48] This is evident, for example, in Millard Erickson's definition of theology as 'that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily upon the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life'.[49] Similarly, Richard J. Gehman advocates a contextualizing theology, which he defines as that dynamic process whereby the people of God living in community and interacting with believers throughout time and space, under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit, proclaim in their own language and thought-forms the Word that God has spoken to them in their context through the study of Scripture.[50]

Other evangelicals, however, have not been satisfied that either contextualization or a mere adjustment in terminology is sufficient. They are convinced that more radical measures are needed if the evangelical theological experiment is to be salvaged. Clark Pinnock, for example, rejects as inflexible and undynamic the 'propositional theology that sees its function as imposing systematic rationality on everything it encounters'.[51] Taking his cue from the contemporary narrative outlook, he chides academic theology for looking for truth in doctrine rather than in the biblical story. Viewing revelation as primarily narrative, Pinnock sees the task of theology as expounding the story and explicating its meanings. Theology, then, is a secondary language whose propositions 'live off the power of the primary story'.[52]

The call to move beyond mere contextualization, as helpful and necessary as this endeavour may be, is surely correct. Despite good intentions, evangelical contextualizers all too easily can remain trapped in a view of propositional revelation that simply equates the divine self-disclosure with the Bible and that propounds an understanding of how the Bible in its canonical form came into existence that is no longer viable. These theologians are likewise at risk of merely continuing the older enterprise of biblical summarization, with only a slight nod to the necessity of rephrasing theological propositions in contemporary language.

Despite his progressive call for contextualization, Erickson occasionally displays this conservative tendency. For example, after bemoaning the neo-orthodox fixation on personal revelation, he gives indication that he himself has not broken out of the fixation on timeless, universal propositions so characteristic of the older propositionalism. He writes, 'If revelation includes propositional truths, then it is of such a nature that it can be

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[47] 47. John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 67.

[48] 48. See, for example, ibid., pp. 60–72.

[49] 49. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1:21.

[50] 50. Richard J. Gehman, 'Guidelines in Contextualization', *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 2, no. 1 (1983):27.

[51] 51. Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 186.

[52] 52. Ibid., pp. 183–84.

preserved. It can be written down or *inscripturated*'.[53] From this declaration he then moves to delineate the traditional doctrine of inspiration.

The shift to narrative, while not providing the entire answer, does mark a helpful beginning point. We must view theology in terms of its proper context within the narrative of God's action in history. This means that the theological task can be properly pursued only 'from within'—that is, only from the vantage point of the faith community in which the theologian stands.

THEOLOGY, FAITH AND THE FAITH COMMUNITY

Despite its shortcomings, evangelical propositionalism encapsulates a fundamental insight. Our faith is tied to the truth content of a divine revelation that has been objectively disclosed. God has communicated truth —himself—to us.

The difficulty with evangelical propositionalism, therefore, is not its acknowledgment of a cognitive dimension of revelation and consequently of the statements of theology. Indeed, the doctrines explored by the theologian are surely more than 'noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientation', to employ George Lindbeck's description of the 'experiential-expressive' dimension of religion.[54]

Instead, the problem with evangelical propositionalism is its often underdeveloped understanding of how the cognitive dimension functions within the larger whole of revelation. Therefore evangelical theologians tend to misunderstand the social nature of theological discourse. More than its advocates have cared to admit, evangelical theology has been the captive of the orientation to the individual knower that has reigned over the western mindset throughout the modern era. But this orientation is now beginning to lose its grip. Therefore, if our theology is to speak the biblical message in our contemporary situation, we must shed the cloak of modernity and reclaim the more profound community outlook in which the biblical people of God were rooted.

The revisioning of the theological task is dependent on a renewed understanding of the role of the community in the life of faith. Evangelicals are correct in asserting that the revealed truth of God forms the 'basic grammar' that creates Christian identity. Rather than merely being a product of our experience, as certain strands of liberalism have tended to argue, in an important sense the truth of God *creates* our experience.[55] But this identity-creative process is not an individualistic matter occurring in isolation. Instead, it is a development that happens within a community.

Voices within the human sciences, not evangelical theologians, have served as the pioneers in the contemporary attempt to move beyond a focus on the autonomous individual. Thinkers in a wide variety of disciplines have been exploring the thesis that personal identity is formed within social structures. There is an intricate web of traditions and beliefs by which we understand ourselves and shape our lives, they theorize. To the degree that it provides the categories or language in which we frame our questions and answers, we are shaped by this inherited web. The transmitting agency that mediates the

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[53] 53. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1:196.

[54] 54. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 16.

[55] 55. See, for example, Pinnock's statement on evangelical theological method. Clark H. Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical-Liberal Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), p. 45. This point is delineated in Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 80.

web of belief to us is the social group or community within which the ongoing process of identity formation occurs.[56]

At stake in the new outlook, therefore, is a more profound understanding of epistemology. Recent thinking has helped us see that the process of knowing, and to some extent even the process of experiencing the world, can occur only within a conceptual framework, a framework mediated by the social community in which we participate.

The application of this understanding to the religious dimension of life follows. Foundational to our self-identity, religion claims, is religious experience—an experience of or encounter with the divine. This experience, as well as the conceptual framework that facilitates it, is mediated by the religious community— through its symbols, narratives and sacred documents—in which we participate.

We must be careful, therefore, not to focus our understanding of religious experience only on an individual-centred paradigm of the divine-human encounter. Although coming in the purview of the individual believer, religious experience is also corporate in nature. In fact, there is a sense of primacy in this corporate experience of encounter with the divine reality. In the biblical tradition, the goal of the human-divine encounter is to constitute a community of people in covenant with God. The Christian church declares that we enter that community through a faith response to the proclamation of the salvific action of God in Christ, symbolized by baptism.

The implications for theology of this understanding of the relationship of the community to individual faith formation are immense. In fact, it has launched a revolution in thinking concerning the task of theology. The ideal that predominated during both the medieval and modern eras viewed theology as a systematic investigation of the range of Christian doctrine, coupled with the attempt to demonstrate the truth of the Christian faith for the entire panorama of human knowledge. In the evangelical movement, this ideal took the form of the isolated scholar seeking to systematize the deposit of truth found in the Bible.

Today the older ideal is losing ground to an emphasis on theology as directed toward a 'practical' purpose—that is, as related to the life and practice of the Christian community. Through the recounting of the biblical narrative of God's salvific action in Israel and preeminently in Christ, the Christian community fulfils a mediating function in the lives of its members. The biblical narrative builds the conceptual framework by which the community views itself and its experience of the world. Theology, in turn, functions within the context of the Christian community by reflecting on its conceptual framework and belief structure.

The newer understanding of theology as 'practical' parallels developments in several of the human sciences. For example, it reflects points of contact with Niklas Luhmann's sociology of theology. According to Luhmann, theology is the self-reflection of religion, and as such it is instrumental in the maintenance of the identity of that religion.[57]

Similar to Luhmann, the German theologian Gerhard Sauter, among others, views the primary task of theology as critical reflection on the life and practice of the church, in order to exercise a critiquing and norming function in contemporary church discourse

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[56] 56. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 25–40.

[57] 57. For a sketch and appraisal of Luhmann's position, see Garrett Green, 'The Sociology of Dogmatics: Niklas Luhmann's Challenge to Theology', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (March 1982):19–34.

and life.[58] The same point is made by Ronald Thiemann, who declares that the goal of theology is 'to understand more fully and more critically the Christian faith in order that the community might better exemplify the Christian identity to which it has been called'.[59] So forceful have been recent voices setting forth the fundamentally practical nature of theology that Peter Slater finds a consensus among theologians that their discipline 'serves the faithful, whether as individuals or collectives, and it does so properly when it enables them *to live* more faithfully'.[60]

One implication of the focus on the practical task of theology is the realization that theological discourse is a second-order discipline pursued 'from within'. The enterprise is a critical, reflective activity that presupposes the beliefs and practices of the Christian community. The theologian, consequently, speaks from the perspective of a personal faith commitment and participation in the life of the community.

The newer thinking suggests that our search for a new evangelical paradigm must begin with the community of faith. To understand theology properly, we must view it within the context of the life of the people of God. Theology is indeed the task of the faith community. We need no other rationale to engage in the discipline than our presence and participation in the Christian community. And our endeavours are fundamentally, even if not totally, directed back toward that community.

These considerations suggest that we may view theology as the faith community's reflecting on the faith experience of those who have encountered God through the divine activity in history and therefore now seek to live as the people of God in the contemporary world. Ultimately, then, the propositions of systematic theology find their source and aim in the identity and life of the community it serves. As Theodore Jennings notes, 'Theological reflection is always reflection on behalf of ... on behalf of a community, on behalf of a tradition, on behalf of a world'.[61]

THEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

How does the Bible fit into this schema? It goes without saying that the Christian community finds the Bible crucial to its task of being the covenant people and living out its calling. But how are we to understand the relationship between Scripture and theology understood as a practical discipline?

The answer to this query lies in the conjunction between theology and revelation. Theology has always been viewed as in some way closely connected to and dependent on revelation. Evangelical thinkers, following the tradition of Protestant scholasticism from Turretin to Hodge, link revelation with Scripture, and consequently they view theology as the systemization of the propositional truth disclosed in the Bible. Neo-orthodoxy agrees that theology is the reflection on revelation, but differs from evangelicalism in its understanding of where such revelation can be found. Neo-orthodox theologians argue that this revelation lies in God's personal self-disclosure, rather than in the propositional truth gleaned from the Scriptures.

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[58] 58. Gerhard Sauter, *Wissenschaftstheoretische Kritik der Theologie* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1973), p. 330.

[59] 59. Ronald F. Thiemann, 'From Twilight to Darkness: Theology and the New Pluralism', *Trinity Seminary Review* 6 (Fall 1984):21.

[60] 60. Peter Slater, 'Theology in the 1990s', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 6 (Fall 1990): 289.

[61] 61. Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), p. 179.

Neither the classic evangelical nor the neo-orthodox position has proved ultimately satisfying. Both are hampered by their emphasis on the individual knower. Revelation, in contrast, is an event that has occurred in the community within which the believing individual stands. 'The revelation of God' is the divine act of self-disclosure, which reveals nothing less than the essence of God. This divine self-disclosure, while standing ultimately at the eschaton— at the end of history—is nevertheless a present reality, for it has appeared proleptically in history. On the basis of Karl Barth's identification of the dependent relationship between the inscripturated word and the Word incarnate, we must view the revelation in history in terms of the process of community formation arising out of the paradigmatic events that stand at its genesis.

The Christian community, emerging as it did out of the older Hebrew trajectory of community formation, was and continues to be constituted by the central events of the biblical narrative. In the New Testament, the church preserved the memory of those grand foundational events together with the earliest responses to the revelation of God in Christ, which it understood in the light and context of the Old Testament. Through the interaction of each succeeding generation with the biblical documents, the paradigmatic events and the early confrontation with these events become a continual source of revelation for the ongoing life of the community. Scripture is the foundational record of how the ancient faith community responded in the context of a trajectory of historical situations to the awareness that God has acted to constitute this people as a covenant community. In this way the Bible stands as the informing and forming canon for the community throughout its history.

Theology is related to these paradigmatic events, as well as to their historical and ongoing use in the community of faith. The task of theology is to assist the contemporary believing community to fulfil its responsibility of proclaiming and living out the message that God has appeared in Christ for the sake of the salvation of humankind. Theology assists in this enterprise as it focuses its attention on the community's confession of faith. To this end it raises the central questions concerning faith: What does it mean to be the community of those who confess faith in the God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth? And how are we to verbalize and embody that confession in the contemporary context? The clarification of these queries on behalf of the church is the role of theology.

To this end, theology functions in a manner similar to Lindbeck's characterization of church doctrine. Taking what he terms a 'cultural-linguistic' approach to conceptualizing religion, Lindbeck sees doctrine as providing a 'regulative' function.[62] For the individual believer, the believing community provides a cultural and linguistic framework that shapes life and thought. More than being moulded by the experiences of individuals within it, the communal reality constitutes a central factor in the shaping of the subjectivities and experiences of its members. It provides a constellation of symbols and concepts which its members employ in order to understand their lives and experiences of the world and within which they experience their world.[63] Taking Lindbeck's idea a step further, we conclude that theology systematizes, explores and orders the community symbols and concepts into a unified whole—that is, into a systematic conceptual framework.

Hence, theology is a second-order enterprise, and its propositions are second-order propositions.[64] Theology formulates in culturally conditioned language the confession

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[62] 62. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 18.

[63] 63. See ibid., p. 33.

[64] 64. See ibid., p. 80.

and worldview of the community of faith —of that people who have been constituted by the human response to the story of the salvific act of God in the history of Jesus the Christ.

The assertion that theology speaks a second-order language is not intended to deny the ontological nature of theological declarations. Nevertheless, the ontological claims implicit in theological assertions arise as an outworking of the intent of the theologian to provide a model of reality, rather than to describe reality directly.

THEOLOGY AND TRUTH

The abiding ontological dimension of theological assertions carries with it an important caution. We dare not conclude from the emphasis on the practical nature of theology that the theologian can now retreat from the public discussion of ultimate truth. The focus on the practical nature of theology does not automatically lead to a new subjectivity; it does not aim to replace the subjectivity of the knowing subject with a subjectivity of the isolated believing community. In this context, the philosophical work of Michael Polanyi is illuminating.[65]

Polanyi claims that our location within the social milieu of a particular place and time is not a liability. Rather, it forms the opportunity for pursuing truth, for although our thought emerges from particular circumstances, it is not limited to them. Further, he argues that all thought strives for truth. But because truth cannot be subjective in either an individual or a social sense, this striving for truth carries a 'universal intent'. However, he cautions against confusing this *concern for* universality with any *claim about* universality. For Polanyi truth always transcends our apprehension of it, and this drives us ever onward in the search for truth. For belief involves compelling orientations to which our formulations and propositions give only approximate expression. On this basis, Polanyi argues that all forms of positivism (which focuses on the propositions themselves as expressing final truth) represent a truncated view of belief.

The contemporary situation demands that we as evangelicals not view theology merely as the restatement of a body of propositional truths, important as doctrine is. Rather, theology is a practical discipline oriented primarily toward the believing community. Polanyi's theses suggest that this situation does not necessarily prevent theologians from raising the truth question. On the contrary, our participation in a faith community involves a basic commitment to a specific conceptual framework. Because faith is linked to a conceptual framework, our participation in a community of faith carries a claim to truth, even if that claim be merely implicit. By its very nature, the conceptual framework of a faith community claims to represent in some form the truth about the world and the divine reality its members have come to know and experience.

To the extent that it embodies the conceptual framework of a faith community, therefore, theology necessarily engages in the quest for truth. It enters into conversation with other disciplines of human knowledge with the goal of setting forth a Christian worldview that coheres with what we know about human experience in the world. To this end, theology seeks to understand the human person and the world as existing in relationship to the reality of God, and in so doing to fashion a fuller vision of God and God's purposes in the world.[66]

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[65] 65. For a discussion of this topic, see Colin Grant, 'Dynamic Orthodoxy: A Polanyian Direction for Theology', *Studies in Religion* 17 (Fall 1988):412–15.

[66] 66. Douglas F. Ottiti, 'Christian Theology and Other Disciplines', *Journal of Religion* 64 (April 1984):182.

The practical and veracious dimensions of the theological enterprise, therefore, are not two disjointed, competing tasks. Rather, they form one interconnected whole. Consequently, we need not agree with his emphasis on 'feeling' to applaud Delwin Brown's conclusion concerning the task of theology:

Religious peoples, Christians and others, inhabit what we might call worlds of felt meaning. That is, our traditions create, sustain, and transform us primarily in the felt dimensions of our personal and corporate lives together—in our worship, in our relationship to our canons, in shared patterns of action, and in our common sensibilities. Theological systems attempt to portray the meaning of these felt worlds in reflective, coherent conceptualities. And in part because each religious world does cohere at a felt level our theological portrayals of them also hang together internally (just as they in turn … must connect up consistently with what we say about the world scientifically, historically, aesthetically, etc.).[67]

Likewise, although James McClendon may be somewhat obscure, he is nevertheless on the right track in defining theology as the 'discovery, understanding, and transformation of the convictions of a convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another *and to whatever else there is*'.[68]

THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

With this description of theology's connection to the believing community in view, we are in a position to delineate more clearly and systematically the nature of theology itself. The goal of our discussion demands that we introduce several of the traditional questions concerning how we are to understand theology and that we view theology in terms of certain related concepts.

Central to such an exploration is the question of how we are to understand theology in comparison to faith. Although intimately related, theology and personal faith differ in certain ways. Faith is by nature immediate. Christian faith arises out of the human encounter with the person of God in Christ, mediated by the faith community's testimony to the divine revelation in Jesus. Faith, therefore, is the personal response to the call of God—and this response involves our presence in a believing community.

The response of faith is all-encompassing, extending to all aspects of a person's being. It includes an intellectual aspect, for in faith we accept as true certain assertions concerning reality, and as a result we view the world in a specific way. Faith includes a volitional aspect, for it entails the commitment of ourselves to Another, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and consequently in a certain sense to the community of the disciples of Jesus.

Theology, in contrast, is the believing community's intellectual reflection on faith. It is the attempt to approach faith as a subject for discussion and reflection in order to illumine and understand it. The focus of the theologians' questions, then, is faith: To what statements do we give assent—that is, what propositions do we accept as reflecting the nature of reality? What is the nature of personal commitment, or what does it mean to commit oneself? To whom are we committing ourselves, or what is the object of our faith? In other words, in so far as theology is reflection on faith, it seeks to isolate the specifically intellectual aspect of faith and then to articulate, clarify and develop this aspect.

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[67] 67. Pinnock and Brown, *Theological Crossfire*, p. 161.

[68] 68. James William McClendon, Ethics, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), p. 23.

The distinction between faith and theology confirms that theology is a second-order endeavour. It is called forth by faith, as Christians seek to reflect on the reality of faith.

The relation between theology and faith also indicates that theology must not be confused with the intellectual discipline known as religious studies, which entails the study of systems of religious belief. In approaching their subject matter, students of religious studies emphasize, as far as possible, objective observation and detached work. Scholars in religious studies seek to work 'from the outside', apart from personal adherence to the belief system under study. Theology, however, while not totally devoid of detached work and objective observation, consists of reflection on faith within the context of the believing community. Its observations are conducted from within the faith stance and the faith community. Theology expresses the nature and content of faith from a sympathetic, committed viewpoint. Thus, in contrast to students of religious studies, theologians do not seek to free themselves from their own faith commitments and their faith community. Rather, they begin with a sympathetic attitude toward the religious tradition in which they stand.

Faith, then, is the key to the difference between theology and religious studies. Theoretically, anyone could engage in the latter, whereas the theological task is limited to persons of faith. Anyone can study Buddhism or Christianity. But no one can be a Buddhist theologian without being a Buddhist, or claim to be a Christian theologian without participating in the Christian tradition. Christian theology seeks to articulate the specifically Christian understanding of reality, one that views the world through the eyes of faith in the God revealed through Jesus.

While theology pulls into its purview reality as a whole and seeks to describe reality from the viewpoint of faith, no theological system ought to be seen as encompassing reality in its fullness. The reality it studies—God, the human person and the world as a whole—can never be fully grasped by the human intellect. Therefore every theological construct will have limitations. At the same time, the human mind can grasp *something* concerning reality. Theology seeks to facilitate this task by the use of models.

Important to our understanding of the role of models in the theological enterprise is the differentiation between replica and analogue models found in contemporary philosophy of science. Whereas replica models strive to replicate the modelled reality on a smaller, more easily visualized scale, analogue models attempt to simulate the structural relationships of the reality modelled. The model constructed by theology is of the latter type rather than the former.[69] A theological system does not provide a 'scale model' of reality. Its statements are not univocal. Rather, it seeks to invoke an understanding of reality by speaking in an analogous fashion about matters that may be mysterious, even ineffable.

No theological system can claim to be a scale model, an exact verbal reproduction of the nature of God, the human person or the world. Nevertheless, a systematic theology can be helpful, in so far as it is an analogue model designed to assist the human spirit in grasping truth concerning reality. Christian theology is an attempt to speak about the world by focusing on the significance of Jesus of Nazareth for creation and history. It seeks to assist the Christian community in articulating the importance for all human life of Jesus Christ, and the importance of a faith commitment to Jesus as the Christ. To this end it constructs an analogue model of reality viewed from the vantage point of commitment to the God revealed in Jesus.

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[69] 69. For a short discussion of the analogous nature of theology, see Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology*, pp. 48–50.

Our theology, of course, is specifically and unabashedly 'Christian'. Hence our theological model must always remain 'orthodox'. It will seek to encapsulate the vision of a world under God which has always stood at the centre of the faith of the people of God. In this sense, theology may be seen as 'retroduction', the delineation of a conceptual model of reality that is informed by the Scriptures and by the theological heritage of the church.

At the same time, as many evangelical theologians have pointed out in recent years, theology must always be a contextual discipline. Rather than merely amplifying, refining, defending and handing on a timeless, fixed orthodoxy, theologians, speaking from within the community of faith, seek to describe the act of faith, the One toward whom faith is directed and the implications of our faith commitment in, for and to a specific historical and cultural context. For this reason, the categories we employ in our theology are by necessity culturally and historically conditioned, and as theologians each of us is both a 'child of the times' and a communicator to the times.

Because the community of faith is to be a faithful people in history, the people of God experience a creative tension between loyalty to their affirmation of faith and the culture in which they dwell. But because this cultural context changes in differing times and places, the theologian's task of seeking to assist the church in relating the Word of God to the varied, changing flow of human thought and life never comes to an end. Theology is always *in transitu*, and the theologian is a pilgrim thinker working on behalf of a pilgrim people.[70]

As a contextual discipline theology performs the function of an 'inter-mediator'. From their vantage point within the Christian tradition, theologians seek to assist the church in bringing the affirmation of faith, 'Jesus is Lord', into the contemporary context. Theology articulates this affirmation in the thought-forms of the culture of the community it serves and shows its implications, relevance and application to life in that society and that place in history. Although the fundamental Christian faith-commitment to God through Christ is unchanging, the world into which this commitment is to be brought is in flux. The theologian serves the church in each generation and each cultural setting by helping the people of God to articulate their faith and apply it to the world in which they live.

GUIDELINES OF THEOLOGY

This understanding suggests several dangers that confront us as Christian theologians. The first potential pitfall arises from the temptation to substitute personal theologizing for a genuine faith commitment. We can easily replace commitment to the living Christ, for example, with our doctrines concerning Christ. Likewise, we run the risk of placing our confidence in our abilities to develop a theological system, rather than in the God in whose service we stand. A related temptation is to move away from theology into religious studies. As theologians we can become so objective in the discipline that we lose from view our personal faith commitment to the Christ on whom our vocation centres. In this way we are in danger of eventually reducing Christianity to the status of one religion among others.

Second, as Christian theologians we run the risk of confusing one specific model of reality with reality itself, or one theological system with truth itself. Although present among persons of all persuasions, this 'canonization' of a particular theological construct is especially problematic among conservative thinkers, for we have a tendency to elevate

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[70] 70. See, for example, Daniel B. Stevick, *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 69.

a specific theologian of the past or the present to the status of 'doctor of the church'. Because all systems are only models of reality—albeit informed by Scripture and by the mileposts of theological history—we must maintain a stance of openness to other models, being aware of the tentativeness and incompleteness of all such systems. In the final analysis, theology is a human enterprise—helpful for the task of the church, to be sure, but a human construct nevertheless.

Finally, as Christian theologians we are tempted to see our task as ending with the construction of a theological system. In actuality, devising a 'system', however important this may be, is not our ultimate goal. Rather, as theologians we engage in articulating faith, in order that the life of each believer and of the faith community in the world might be served. Our theological reflection ought to make a difference in Christian living. Doctrinal expression is designed to help clarify the ways in which Christian commitment is to be lived. It likewise ought to help motivate all Christians to live in accordance with their commitment.

In short, our theology must overflow into ethics. Whenever theology stops short of this, it has failed to be obedient to its calling.

Michael Goldberg is on the right track when he concludes from his recounting of the story of Augustine, 'Though a propositional theology may have its place, that place is limited by life itself, for as its propositions are abstracted and drawn from life, so too, in the end, they must return to life and have meaning for life in order to be theologically significant'.[71]

In the same way, we need not go all the way with Lindbeck in discounting the ontological intent of theological descriptions to agree with his main point: 'The primary focus is not on God's being in itself, for that is not what the text is about, but on how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God's character as an agent as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and of Jesus'.[72]

A revisioned evangelical theology seeks to reflect on the faith commitment of the believing community in order to construct a model of reality. This model in turn aims to foster a truly evangelical spirituality that translates into ethical living in the social-historical context in which we are called to be the people of God.

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Toward Integration in the Theological School Curriculum

[71] 71. Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p. 95.

[72] 72. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 121.

Victor Babajide Cole

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF *THEOLOGIA*

It is necessary to begin by seeking to understand the meaning of theology. As has been noted, the term refers to things of entirely different genres.[1] However, it is necessary to clarify the term as we approach the subject of integration of learning in theological education. Hence this brief overview of the history of *theologia*.

From the time of the Greek theorists, the term *epistm* has carried two meanings, namely, true knowledge as opposed to mere opinion or *doxa*, and an organized body of knowledge or a deliberate inquiry that produces a body of knowledge.[2] The Latin translation of *epistm* also carried this same double meaning. That way, *scientia* (Latin) meant knowledge, a habit (*habitus*) of the soul by which truth is differentiated from error. Equally, the Latin referred to the enterprise of investigation or reflection which produces knowledge. This double meaning then is western and specifically Greek in origin, and it affects the history of the meaning of *theologia*.

Whereas the term 'theology' fully took hold with the schoolmen after the eleventh century, it seems the Greek church Fathers employed it as a reference to the true mystical knowledge of the one God. The term is obviously not used in the Bible. However, the concept, if not the term, is evident in Scripture as well as in Christendom prior to its formal adoption after the eleventh century. Socrates, following a Sophist viewpoint, had maintained that man's first obligation was to know himself. That was regarded as wisdom. The Greek church Fathers, Thomist and the clerical schoolmen realizing this, said that true and substantial wisdom involved knowledge of God which was acquired as a result of a cognitive enterprise through the aid of appropriate methods which then resulted in a body of teachings, a discipline.

The term 'theology' then carried the basic idea of a *habitus*, knowledge which allowed for a double meaning. The primary meaning, so far as it concerned practical salvation-oriented knowledge of God linked to the life of faith, prayer, virtues and the yearning for God, whose end is eternal happiness with God, can be termed practical *habitus*. This concept (not the term) is evident in the Scripture, particularly in the teacher-disciple relationship between Jesus and the Twelve, and in the Paul-Timothy or Paul-Titus relationship.[3] This Scripture model could be termed the original practical *habitus*. The

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[1] 1. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 31.

[2] 2. Farley, op. cit.

[3] 3. Both Jesus and Paul adopted the informal peripatetic mode of training of the ministry. In that mode the practical habitus formed both the end and subject matter of training. This habitus involved a personal, cognitive disposition towards God and the things of God. Jesus was the example par excellence in the process of training. He invited his followers to learn of him (Matt. 11:29). This habitus was tied to the faith life, to prayer, virtues and the soul's yearning for the living God. Training centred on 'practice', but of a different kind from what we usually refer to as 'practice' today. For Jesus, and Paul following after his Lord, 'practice' involved the Christian life, Christian existence and behaviour. All these correspond to character, value, and spiritual formation. The Pauline 'curriculum' hinted at in 2 Tim. 3:10–17, if carefully examined, bears testimony to this habitus in the course of training Timothy for ministry.

other meaning in this pre-modern usage, in so far as it concerned self-conscious scholarly quest, a discipline whose locus was usually a pedagogical setting, can then be termed cognitive *habitus*. It corresponded to the efforts of discerning and setting forth in writing the truth revealed by God through Christ.

It would then seem that the theory-practice distinction in *theologia* can be traced to a distant past. Both meanings can then be traced on parallel lines from earlier times in the history of Christendom up to the present. This theory-practice distinction also lies behind the study versus vocation debate, with the former corresponding to 'theory' and the latter corresponding to 'practice'.[4]

The period from the Middle Ages (about the twelfth century, the era of the medieval university) to the Enlightenment period (of the modern university) saw the development and heightening of this double meaning. The clerical schoolmen formally introduced the term *theologia*. For them knowledge was *hexis*, an enduring characteristic of the soul. It was this *hexis* that was translated into the Latin, *habitus*. So for the scholastic theologians, knowledge (*scientia*) was portrayed as (*habitus*). Consequently, as applied to theology, it was a *habitus*, a cognitive disposition and soul orientation which had the character of knowledge. But when asked what kind of knowledge theology carried, the double meaning became evident.

The Augustinian-monastic line would say that theology is a practical, rather than a theoretical *habitus*, having the primary character of wisdom, a salvation-oriented (existential-personal) knowledge of God. Some concede that this wisdom may be promoted, deepened and extended by human study, although it is something directly infused as a divine gift linked to faith, prayer and virtue.

On the opposing side was the Thomist school of thought which maintained that theology is a discipline, a 'science' in the Aristotelian sense of a demonstrative undertaking. There had always been people in the church who engaged in controversy, who refuted heresy and offered systematic expositions of Christian doctrine (e.g. Origen). Now, with the rise of medieval universities, those who were earlier learning, teaching and expounding, were formed into a university faculty. Some ordered procedures for arriving at theological knowledge were developed; it was here that the scholastic line of disputation was employed in theology. Theology as a cognitive *habitus* of the soul was now developed into a deliberate and methodical undertaking which resulted in knowledge, a discipline. In the medieval university *theologia* became a science/ discipline with clear-cut methods. A *ratio studioru*m for these studies which are theological then developed, together with a new set of literature on 'the study of theology'. In this second sense, theology as Aristotelian science continued from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries in the universities, occupying the capstone as 'Queen' of the sciences.

Today, we regard 'practice' in the process of training, strictly to be in terms of doing the ministry, techniques of ministry. But for Jesus, the emphasis was on being, on the making of 'the man of God', while doing was a natural by-product. To make 'the man of God', Jesus communicated his own life to the disciples (consult Karl Heinrich Rengstorf's articles, '*Didaskō, Didaskalos*' in TDNT vol. 2, 1964, pp. 135–165; and '*Manthanō … Mathētēs …*' in TDNT vol. 4, 1964, pp. 390–461, for a good treatment of the disciple-teacher relationship set forth by our Lord.) The distancing of the teacher from the taught was unknown in the model of Jesus' training (also adopted by Paul). The call to discipleship meant being with the Master and learning of (about and from) him first (i.e. becoming), before going into service (or doing ministry). See further Mk. 3:13, 14; Mt. 4:19; 11:29.

[4] 4. See Gehard Ebeling, *The Study of Theology*, trans. Duane Priebe (St. James's Place, London: Collins, Sons & Co. Ltd.), pp. 2–5.

The dual meaning, however, created an on-going tension between study and vocation, between 'theory' and 'practice'.[5] In the period leading to the Enlightenment, the two parallel viewpoints of *theologia* were maintained. The original practical *habitus* led to the Augustinian-monastic tradition of theology. This resulted in a concept of pious learning or divinity with which the pietist movement (starting with German pietism) identified. This[6] forms the foundation of the twentieth century professional functionalist movement in theological schools.[7] Diagrammatically, the line of progression just described is as represented in Fig. 1.
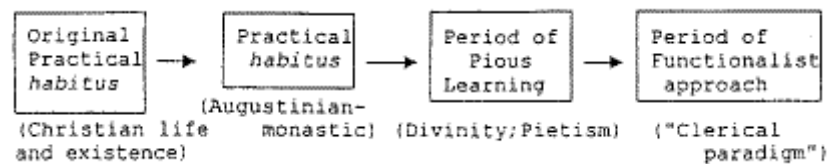

Fig. 1 The Progression of Theology as Practical Habitus

On the other side is the development of theology as cognitive *habitus*, a discipline. Prior to the Thomist rationalist movement, a body of knowledge had existed in the form of apologetic materials, church dogmas, expositions. That was in some sense the germ of theology as the original cognitive *habitus*. The Thomist rationalists, however, formalised this on-going tradition into a discipline in the Aristotelian sense; thus was born in a formal sense the *habitus* that is purely cognitive. With the Enlightenment came the period of specialised learning and the pressure on theology to justify its inclusion as a science in the emerging modern university. The earlier literature on 'the study of theology' soon evolved into the literature known as theological encyclopaedia.[8]

In the pre-Enlightenment period, beginning with the schoolmen, the 'study of theology' literature presented theology as a discipline, but a unitary discipline. In the wake of the Enlightenment, other disciplines became an essential part of the study of theology. Each assembled its own literature, sources and methods. Various configurations of the disciplines attendant to the task of theology emerged, but in the end, it was Andreas Gerhard's four-fold pattern (known as the Hagenbach scheme) that prevailed. That

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[5] 5. The use of 'practice' up to this time was in terms of the Christian life and existence and not in terms of techniques of ministry as known to the twentieth century. This was the way 'practice' was connoted in the Scripture—as the original practical habitus, rather than in terms of ministry skills acquisition.

[6] 6. The German pietist movement stands out in history through the influence of the University of Halle, and of the Spener-Francke efforts. At its inception the University of Halle struggled to retain in its theology department both the academic and the personal practical disposition. In so doing, German pietism of Hermann Francke was in tune with the period of pious learning. In that same tradition was the sixteenth century English model later imported to America of seeking further study in theology under a prominent pastor. Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) illustrates the sort of literature for preparing such ministers.

[7] 7. The twentieth century has witnessed in theological schools a functionalist approach which is centred on theory-practice distinction. This is 'practice' of a different kind, namely in terms of skills and techniques of ministry.

[8] 8. The theological encyclopaedia refers to the literature on introductory matters or theological propaedeutics. The issues at stake concerned both the problem of how to divide the subject matter of the theological disciplines and the problem arising from the division of that subject matter into the disciplines. The latter concerns the theological problem associated with the genre and unity of theology, or the quest to determine whether the genre and unity are in any sense a 'discipline', and if so, the determination of their sub-disciplines and what auxiliary disciplines they might require (See Farley, op. cit., pp. 93, 94).

scheme had been put forward in 1556, when theology was a singular discipline. It involved exegetical theology, historical theology, dogmatic theology, and practical theology. However, in the wake of the Enlightenment and in an attempt to justify inclusion of theology in the modern German university curriculum, the disciplines of theology were formulated. It was Schleiermacher who championed the argument for theology's continuing inclusion in the university. He said theology was a 'positive' science, by which he meant its specificity to a particular community, area of need, and leadership. He said that theology serves the need of the church and as such should be oriented to those needs.[9] Schleiermacher addressed the subject of the unity of the aggregate disciplines that was emerging. He saw the unity in terms of the concern for matters affecting the practice of a major profession.[10] This is a reference to the needs of the church for leadership; that is, the capacity to educate the leadership of the church.

The post-Schleiermacher encyclopaedists in the nineteenth century shifted the issue from the 'essence of Christianity' to the 'science of the Christian religion', but still for the purpose of clergy education. These encyclopaedists too were strongly influenced by the post-Enlightenment historical-critical mind-set. Christianity formed the subject of inquiry. The unity of *theologia* centred on the education of the clergy and as such in the study of 'Christianity'. Thus, the 'science of the Christian religion' as a historical-theological approach, dominated in the nineteenth century encyclopaedic movement. The three curricular phases of the time were: the historical science of Christianity; the normative science of the truth of Christianity, and the applied science of the ministry. These phases constitute a three-fold division of the disciplines as Schleiermacher's scheme had done. Nonetheless, it was the four-fold Hagenbach scheme that eventually prevailed. In all the schemes though, a theory-practice distinction was evident. To illustrate this from the Hagenbach scheme, exegetical, historical, and dogmatic studies were regarded as 'theory', and the fourth, practical studies, was regarded as 'practice'.[11]

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[9] 9. G. Heinrici, 'Encyclopedia, Theologica,' in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (1977 reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), vol. 4 p. 127.

[10] 10. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, (trans. William Farrar, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1850) (American Library edition, 1963), pp. 91–97. Schleiermacher however favoured a three-fold division of the disciplines of theology into: philosophical theology (apologetics and polemics), historical theology (dogmatics, exegesis and church history), and practical theology (rules for carrying out the task of ministry, covering areas of church government and church service). See Heinrici, op. cit., p. 127. This three-fold division was characterised by the historical consciousness and method of the times. What then formed the subject matter or substance of the Schleiermacher encyclopaedia was 'the essence of Christianity'. It was in that respect that theology constituted a science. Thus, theologia now assumed a new meaning, namely, an aggregate of sciences (cognitions) necessary for clergy education. What was pursued in that quest to educate the clergy was the 'distinctive essence of Christianity'.

[11] 11. Three forms of 'practice' can now be identified in the career of *theologia*. The first is 'practice' in the sense of the Christian life and existence as in the case of the original practical *habitus*. The second is 'practice' in the Schleiermacherian conception of the term. Schleiermacher saw 'practice' essentially in terms of theoria, or normative rules necessary for carrying out the tasks of ministry. It is a reference then to 'a *theoria* directly related to the praxis of the church's leadership' (Farley, op. cit., p. 91). It is still a reference to what the leadership of the church must know in order to promote the health of the church. The third is the twentieth century functionalist x paradigm which limits 'practice' to techniques of skills for ministry.
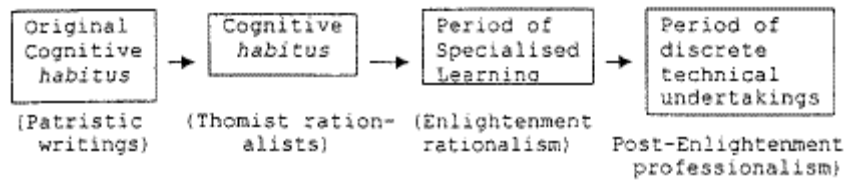
Fig. 2 The Progression of Theology as Cognitive Habitus

THE FRAGMENTATION OF *THEOLOGIA*

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the Enlightenment had introduced a radical shift in the study of *theologia*, whose legacy endures today in the form of the dispersion of the field of theology. But it should be noted that the encyclopaedic issues that dominated the agenda of *theologia* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even in the first two decades of the twentieth century, were essentially about a curriculum originally designed for teaching specialists in the modern university setting. That agenda was taken over uncritically by the seminary from its inception in the nineteenth century. The Enlightenment had thus introduced into *theologia*, the period of specialised learning, with the agenda of *theologia* dictated by specialist interests. With the tendency to specialisation came distinct critical apparata, languages, methods, and satellite or auxiliary secular disciplines to match. It was these auxiliary disciplines that provided the scholarly apparata for the theological disciplines and gave them the character of 'science'. Today, the four-fold division in the theological school curriculum has been further fragmented into 'catalogue fields' or mere ways of organising courses.[12]

Two principal causes for the fragmentation of *theologia* are the loss of a normative basis of authority and its reposition in human reason, and the related loss of any theologically based material unity of the course of study, or the loss of any substantive coherence of the course of study. Thus *theologia* as cognitive *habitus* (illustrated in Fig. 2), has therefore now become specialised, fragmentary and discrete learning. We are therefore, according to that other line of development, in a period of technical and specialised scholarly undertakings.

The parallel lines of the career of *theologia* starting with the Greek church Fathers would form something like that which is depicted in Fig. 3.

Variants of the original practical *habitus* (in the form of a Christian life leading to final salvation) at one time existed alongside the original cognitive *habitus* (in form of patristic writings). The development of those parallel variants of the original practical and cognitive *habits* was represented by the opposing Augustinian-monastic and Thomist rationalist lines. The period of pious learning (represented during the period of divinity and eventually championed by the pietists), and that of specialised learning (championed in the end by Enlightenment rationalists), though at some point in parallel, nonetheless rivalled each other at other times. The present period, dominated by the 'clerical paradigm' within theological schools, (commonly termed, 'theological education') exists side by side with the present period of discrete, technical, and specialist undertakings informed by the post-Enlightenment view of professionalism (regarded in some quarters as 'theology').

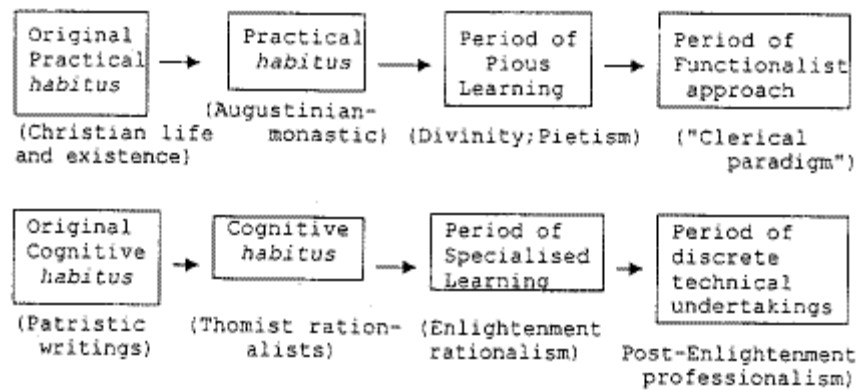
[12] 12. Farley, op. cit., p. 142.

Fig. 3 The Parallel Lines of Progression of Theologia

THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

From the brief overview above, certain nagging questions arise. What then is theology (already examined in part)? How does theology relate to theological education? What in fact is theological education? What role is there, if any, for academic study of theology or for academic study in the course of theological education? What role is there, if any, for Christian life and existence, ministry skills and the like, in theology and in theological education? These questions together touch upon the matter of the head, the heart and the hands in the course of training for ministry.

Theology has been shown to bear two sets of meaning which together are responsible for the on-going tension between 'theory' and 'practice'. In the light of this tension, there is a view of theology which restricts it strictly to a purely academic exercise, whereby the Bible, Christianity, and the Christian faith, become objects of study.[13]

A related point of view then takes 'theological education' as a generic term for preparatory studies for the Christian ministry,[14] while reserving 'theology' for the purely academic pursuit. In this way, 'theological education' is a professional enterprise of preparation in skills needed for ministry. One might then ask, what are the fundamental issues of theology and theological education? Are the real issues about theory-practice relationship? Are they about the relationship of study (scholarship) and vocation (ministry)? In a sense, both issues might be related. If the emphasis is purely on scholarship, the approach that takes Christianity, the Christian faith, and Scripture as objects of study seems justified. However, the question remains of how to forge the inter-relatedness of the discrete disciplines of academic theology into a unity. If, on the other hand, the emphasis is on vocation, the training required must of necessity come to terms with the nature, purpose and task of the church for which training is targeted. Consequently, the view of ministry and of who is a minister should inform the curricular contents. It would of course be in order to examine the historic patterns and principles of the Christian faith, ministry and its orders, beginning from the Scriptures. Then there would be the need to examine received traditions to ascertain points of continuity and discontinuity.[15]

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[13] 13. Farley, op. cit., p. 142.

[14] 14. Farley, op. cit., p. 134.

[15] 15. For example, I think we seem to have lost both the title and the concept of discipleship in the process of training of the ministry. While we have kept the title of pastor, we seem to have lost the original concept behind the title. We have equally lost sight of both the title and the concept of 'the flock of God'.

Even then, from a purely vocational perspective, the issue of what constitutes the unity of the course of study is very relevant. For example, the prevalent practice today in theological education of uncritically retaining the four-fold division calls for scrutiny. It is a fair question to ask, whether the task or function of the ministry is what forms the unity of the course of study in our present-day 'clerical paradigm'? It then quickly becomes apparent that the four-fold pattern is not the theory of practice of the ministry. Even the so-called division of 'theory and practice' proves inadequate when closely scrutinised. In other words, the 'three' (exegetical, historical and dogmatic theology) are not the theory of the 'fourth' (practical theology).

One of course need not be limited to a purely 'theory' or a purely 'practice'; a purely 'study' or a purely 'vocation' approach. There is another option—to seek integration of the seemingly irreconcilable in the theological school curriculum. There are those who imply that an integration between 'theory' and 'practice', between 'study' and 'vocation', is difficult, if not impossible.[16] The attempt here is however to tackle this seemingly irreconcilable enterprise. To do so, I shall first examine broad categories of the school curriculum, drawing heavily from educational principles. The broad categories of the curriculum will hopefully provide an appreciation of the dynamics involved in any educational task, especially as applicable to theological education. Next I shall examine the end served by the theological school curriculum, thus re-appraising the 'theory-practice' issue. I shall then be setting forth what I consider to be the central and motivating factor of the course of study. In that the professional paradigm is the prevalent approach of the theological school today, I shall be making a critical appraisal of it before finally suggesting ways for achieving integration in the theological course of study, thereby seeking to enhance the training of the ministry.

BROAD CATEGORIES OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Eisner provides us with three broad categories of the formal school curriculum under the rubric, 'The Three Curricula that All Schools Teach'.[17] These are first the explicit curriculum, or those salient aspects of what the school, in intention and in reality, offers to students. There is also the implicit curriculum, or those non-salient aspects of what the school in fact teaches students, but not intentionally so. This tends to have a sociological and psychological impact on students of more lasting effect than even the explicit curriculum. The implicit or 'hidden' curriculum is often illustrated from its negative impact on students, but Eisner points out that it does involve as well a host of intellectual

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Consequently, culturally-attuned concepts, often unbiblical, tend to guide our views and practices of the ministry and its orders.

[16] 16. Thomas Ogletree had pleaded with the academically oriented to venture into practical life applications while the practically minded should draw from the resources of academic disciplines. To this, Mudge and Poling in their editorial comment said that such a plan was asking 'the student to perform feats of intellectual and practical integration that no one on the faculty seems prepared to demonstrate' [L.S. Mudge and J.N. Poling (eds.), *The Promise of Practical Theology: Formation and Reflection*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. xvi].
In reacting to such a sentiment that dichotomises between what is purely the 'work of the church' and the 'work of the school', John Frame said that 'seminaries not only frequently "refuse to do the work of the church"; they also tend to undo it … A seminary which does not "do the work of the church" does not "train men for the ministry" either' [John M. Frame, 'Proposal for a New North American Model,' in Harvie M. Conn and Samuel F. Rowen (eds.) *Missions & Theological Education*, (Farmington, Michigan: Urbanus), pp. 371–372, 376].

[17] 17. Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), pp. 74–92.

and social virtues such as punctuality, hard work, delayed gratification, and so forth.[18] Finally there is the 'null' curriculum, or those things that are deliberately omitted from teaching by the school. The two major dimensions of this fall in the area of intellectual processes as well as in the content or subject area. Eisner however notes that the school teaches certain subject matters out of tradition and not because a range of alternatives were first considered. Thus, some subjects get taught out of habit while others that could prove exceedingly useful get neglected.[19]

A close look at the theological school curriculum reveals that all the three broad categories of curricula are present. Attention will now be given to the explicit, the implicit and the 'null' curricula of the theological school.

THE EXPLICIT CURRICULUM

This is the aspect of the theological school that is readily recognised because it is represented by the deliberate listing of subject matters. It is also concerned with what teachers and students consciously deal with in the teaching-learning process, whether as planned or as directly implemented, and as such it is generally perceived to be the totality of the curriculum.

In tracing the career of *theologia* to the stage when it became formalised into disciplines, the explicit curriculum had assumed various forms: a dual theory-practice division; a three-fold division; and a four-fold division of the subject matters. The varieties of forms into which the disciplines were cast concern those very aspects of the curriculum that are explicit. The effects of auxiliary disciplines on the division of the explicit curriculum have already been alluded to. The result today is the domination of the division of theological studies by specialist interests.

From a singular discipline in the medieval university the study of theology was firstly fragmented into three or four disciplines during the encyclopaedia era. In the post-encyclopaedia era, the disciplines were further fragmented into many sub-specialties that are said to have lost contact with their respective disciplines.[20] The explicit curriculum now attracts faculty specialists in literatures of the sub-disciplines and their auxiliary sciences: linguistic studies, therapeutic psychology, social sciences, philosophical systems, general history, and so forth. It is for this very reason that the 'catalogue fields' are said to have lost common norms by which they can be described as theological.[21]

The fragmentation of the explicit curriculum is widely recognised. Niebuhr, writing in the middle of the twentieth century said that, 'the curriculum no longer is a course of study but has become a series of studious jumps in various directions'.[22] Farley too says that three to four of the six semesters in a typical north American seminary are dominated by an aggregate of relatively 'independent disciplines', 'one course exposure', resulting in seminary education that is characterised by 'a mélange of introductions'.[23]

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[18] 18. Eisner, op. cit., p. 81.

[19] 19. Eisner, op. cit., p. 88.

[20] 20. Farley, op. cit., p. 142.

[21] 21. Farley, op. cit., p. 145.

[22] 22. Richard H. Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977 reprint), p. xviii.

[23] 23. Farley, op. cit., pp. 14, 15.

It is increasingly recognised that the explicit curriculum of theological schools must be subjected to fundamental review in the material or substantive part, otherwise renewal efforts are 'cosmetic' (Farley). What generally obtains during a review of the curriculum is 'political negotiations between the area fiefdoms',[24] and what I term, 'horse-trading.' It is only occasionally that the 'theoretical' disciplines of Bible, dogmatics and church history yield ground. Activities aimed at reform are however more readily observed in the 'practical' portion of the four-fold division, but that is often in terms of the introduction of more 'practical' subject matters. In the process, and because it is difficult for the entrenched disciplines to yield ground, it is not unusual to have curriculum overload as a result. The outcome then is further dispersion of the 'catalogue fields', and the inability to see the unity and inter-relationships between them.

When all things are considered, we sense a growing realisation among those concerned about renewal of theological education and theology of the need for substantive renewal of the explicit curriculum.

THE IMPLICIT CURRICULUM

A host of things are taught unintentionally in the theological school curriculum which nonetheless greatly impact upon students. It is for that reason that the 'hidden curriculum' is at work in the process of training of the ministry. The implicit curriculum impacts both the intellectual and the socio-psychological aspects of the students' training. The impact can be positive or negative. The following examples will illustrate the point.

On the use of initiative, educational sociologists have observed that students tend to be conditioned in the formal school context to giving the teacher what is expected. This stifles initiative in most cases. The students pick up the cue directly from what they observe in the teachers. Take for example, a first year student of Greek in the first semester of school in a M.Div. programme who was overheard speaking to his Greek professor as follows: 'I am learning to adjust to your class. In my entire career as an undergraduate I had been taught to think, I am therefore not used to learning by memorization. Just give me time, and I will fully adjust …' The implication is obvious, and sadly so. The student was being conditioned to the expectation to learn by rote. It should however be noted that what is taught unintentionally in form of the implicit or 'hidden' curriculum is based on pedagogical schemes intentionally adopted by the teacher. It is just that an unintended effect is the result. Thus the 'hidden' curriculum is the direct result of a course of action taken, or at times it is due to inaction. On a positive note, however, this also means that the areas of character formation, values, spiritual development, and so forth most suited to the informal mode of education can be addressed through the implicit curriculum.

A familiar thing that happens in many theological schools is for the teacher to assign a prescribed number of pages of reading assignments, checked often by means of 'pop quizzes'. Such may inadvertently reinforce reading for the teacher and not necessarily for personal satisfaction. Students are thus often heard asking from their teachers, what materials will or will not be required in the exams.

It is observed that the classroom setting often conditions students to work alone and to learn to compete among themselves. Some of the direct causes of the competitive spirit include the kind of reward system adopted by teachers, especially for examination purposes, and in the grading system adopted. In order to compete 'successfully', students sometimes seek ways and means to edge out one another. Admittedly, there is nothing

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[24] 24. Farley, op. cit., p. 5.

explicitly stated in course syllabi to promote a competitive spirit, but it is nevertheless promoted indirectly by what is done intentionally.

Mention should also be made of the general ethos of the training or learning environment as touching the implicit curriculum. Tied in to this is the way of life, the kinds of students that a school tends to cater for, what gets communicated to students as important, and so forth. The delicate balance, call it tension, between study and vocation and the personal spiritual development of the man or woman of God comes into play here. What a theological school communicates to its students as important has very much to do with the general ethos of the learning environment.

Students are able to sense from what is said or not said, from what is done or not done, how a theological school maintains the balance between the academic, the practical, and the personal spiritual life. The place accorded to chapel as well as the quality of corporate worship and fellowship; the example set by teachers and significant others in terms of standard of scholarship, integrity of life, prayer, devotion, faith, sensitivity to the world around, and so forth; what the school communicates about the place of practical ministry's contribution to training; the view of ministry and the image of the minister; all have a lot to do with the implicit curriculum in the training for ministry. The general ethos of the training environment will equally be translated into the kinds of students admitted. In actual fact, who is admitted and the ethos of the training environment are mutually reinforcing.

All those things that affect the implicit curriculum stem from what is done deliberately in the context of formal training—it is only their effects that tend to be unintentional. It is this unintentionality that enables us in the formal mode of training to bring in the dimensions of the informal and the non-formal modes as well. What the teacher does and says impacts upon students in more ways than readily meet the eye. Indeed, teachers in seminaries tend to reproduce their own kind.[25] If the teacher imitates Christ before the students, exhibits the mind of Christ, relates theory with practice in his/her own life, demonstrates a well-rounded life of balance between academic study, vocation, and spirituality, students will sense all of these. It is therefore not a question of whether the teacher serves as a model, but what type of model? Obviously, the explicit curriculum will probably not mention what the teacher teaches by his/her own life and example. The seminary teacher, as a significant other, provides for the students during their time of training the most salient image of the minister and of what the ministry is about. So then, whether the seminary teacher knows it or not, whether he/she wants it or not, the teacher is a model. Modelling then forms the core of the implicit or 'hidden' curriculum in the training of the ministry.

THE 'NULL' CURRICULUM

Just as theological schools teach certain things, usually different configurations of the four-fold division of theological studies, there are certain other things not taught. The fact is, that no school can afford to teach at any one time everything that could be taught in a particular discipline. However, what gets left out affects the consequences of training by very reason of its being excluded.

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[25] 25. Harvie M. Conn, 'Theological Education and the Search for Excellence,' *Westminster Theological Journal* vol. XLI, No. 2, 1979, p. 330.

Although not employing the term, 'null' curriculum, Hough and Cobb list what they regard as five 'important topics' often neglected in the theological school curriculum.[26] In their own proposal for restoration of the unity of theological studies, Hough and Cobb propose a curriculum that they hope will produce the 'Practical theologian'.[27] They propose to centre theological education around various contemporary practical issues such as racism, sexism, ecology, economic justice, and so forth. These topics, they propose, should be looked at by the drawing of insights from the Bible, history of Christianity and theology, as the need may arise. What such a proposal would however do to the four-fold pattern has already been pointed out by others.[28] In effect, Hough and Cobb create a new set of 'neglected topics'! What this therefore leads us to is the inevitability of neglect of certain topics. In that everything cannot be covered in the given time allotted for training, inclusion as well as exclusion of topics become inevitable. This is where clarity of purpose, goal and objectives of training become crucial in the process of inclusion and exclusion.

Certainly the answer to the 'null' curriculum is not an overloaded curriculum. The allegation that the theological school curriculum in its present atomistic form which is dispersed into 'catalogue fields' (Farley) is no longer a course of study ought then to be taken seriously.[29] To ensure that the theological school curriculum is a course of study as opposed to 'a clutch of courses' (Kelsey), the aggregate of the subjects on offer should be integrated towards a common end, a unifying purpose.

THE END SERVED BY THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Usually two different views are proposed regarding the end to be served by the curriculum of a theological school. They are first, that the direction of every subject taught should be focused on the elucidation of the Christian faith, and second, that they should be directed towards the practice of ministry. Kelsey and Hopewell both point out that the theological school curriculum is in that way directed to the individual who is being trained for ministry in the local church.[30] The curriculum thereby neglects the life and development of the congregation in situ. Hopewell would therefore say that theological education tends to neglect the self-understanding of a congregation's identity.[31] This is why he proposes a 'congregational paradigm' instead of a 'clerical paradigm'. While the latter focuses on the individual to be trained, the former focuses on 'a corporate form of

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[26] 26. Joseph C. Hough and John B. Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 109ff.

[27] 27. The initial list of recommended courses in the curriculum for the education of the 'Practical theologian' [Hough & Cobb, 1985, pp. 129–130) has since been revised, based on responses to the initial proposal. Consult Browning, Polk and Evison (1989) pp. 107ff.] for the revision.

[28] 28. Don S. Browning, David Polk and Ian S. Evison (eds.) *The Education of the Practical Theologian: Responses to Joseph Hough and John Cobb's Christian Identity and Theological Education*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989), p. xii.

[29] 29. See Richard H. Niebuhr, op. cit., p. viii; David H. Kelsey, 'A Theological Curriculum About and Against the Church,' in Joseph C. Hough and Barbara G. Wheeler (eds.) *Beyond Clericalism*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 37ff.

[30] 30. Kelsey, op. cit., pp. 38f.; James F. Hopewell, 'A Congregational Paradigm for Theological Education,' in Joseph C. Hough and Barbara G. Wheeler (eds.), *Beyond Clericalism*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 1–9.

[31] 31. Hopewell, op. cit., p. 8.

learned ministry'[32] It is this point that Kelsey seems to carry forward in his alternative a 'non-individualistic' picture of the ends to which all subjects in the course of study should be directed.

It will be noted that the two ends to which the curriculum is usually recommended to be directed—the Christian faith[33] and the ministry[34] —touch upon theory and practice respectively. This 'theory', or the intellectual interpretation of the faith for the student, is referred to as the proper subject matter of the curriculum by Kelsey, but it is nevertheless said to be 'elusive'. In that case, 'the faith' does not serve as a criterion for judging the unity or otherwise of the curriculum. What we are leading to in all this is the extent to which inclusion and exclusion pervade the theological school curriculum. The philosophy of education of the ministry has much to do with the process of deciding what to teach and why. It equally has much to do with the process of deciding what is not taught and why. That philosophy also touches upon the theological understanding of the nature of the faith community, its purpose, what is the church's ministry, and in view of all these, what form of training of the ministry is most appropriate.

When the curriculum of training is conceptualised in purely academic terms or purely in terms of techniques of ministry, something is said about the philosophy of education of the ministry. When the faith life, the inner life, character, virtues, spirituality, are excluded from the core of the curriculum, that too says something about the philosophy of training of the ministry that is adopted in the particular programme of training. In all of these, what is not taught explicitly or implicitly becomes as important to the type of training on offer as what is taught. The core of the curriculum must therefore be seen in terms of the training outcomes desired— whether in terms purely of academic emphasis, or practical skills emphasis, or formation of the inner spiritual life, or a holistic balance of all three. A holistic view of training of the ministry cannot be in terms of either-or. The three characteristics of the theological school curriculum must reflect a common theme serving to unify the course of study. Theological educators can adopt, if they try hard, all three modes of education—formal, non-formal, and informal—in order to achieve holism.

The purely cognitive domain corresponds largely to the purely academic aspect of training. This aspect, whether in terms of the four-fold pattern or other configurations, must have a theological unifying principle. The effective domain corresponds largely to formation of values, character, spirituality, and so forth. Whereas these are better caught than taught in the informal context, it should be pointed out that the formal context too can be deliberately contrived to address this vital area of formation of the man or woman of God. These areas that are better caught than taught fall within the purview of the implicit curriculum of the theological school, as the teacher models before the students the life patterned after Christ. The practical hands-on skills area corresponds somehow to the psycho-motor domain which is best taught in the non-formal mode.[35] We should

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[32] 32. Hopewell, op. cit., p. 9.

[33] 33. Schleiermacher had posited 'the essence of Christianity', while the nineteenth century encyclopaedists who followed him adopted 'the science of the Christian religion'. Even though the interpretations differ they are about the 'Christian faith' in one form or another.

[34] 34. The twentieth century form of the 'clerical paradigm' purports that clerical tasks of the ministry provide the unity of the course of study. The associated problems with this view have been briefly alluded to earlier on.

[35] 35. I offer caution in the area of temptation to offer strictly neat differentiation between the domains of learning. For example, practical skills of the ministry in terms of techniques only somehow relate to the psycho-motor domain. We say this because 'practical skills' of preaching, teaching, and counselling, just to name a few of the prominent 'skills' area, do not neatly fall into the psycho-motor area that involves co-

point out that formal training of the ministry has to be in partnership with the local church to ensure that a gulf does not exist between the school's theory and the church's practice.[36]

There is no doubt that the centrality and motivating factor in a curriculum of training for the ministry must be supreme love for God through study of and obedience to his Word, love for the people of God and the world at large. Thus, whether it be in terms of the personal walk with God or in terms of the acquisition of learning and practical skills for ministry, love and a heart for God must be the salient motivating factor. This disposition towards God and his creation in the realisation of his purpose on earth cannot be assumed, implied, forced or faked. It is born of an inner disposition that cannot be legislated in order to realise it and yet it must somehow be included both explicitly and implicitly in the theological school curriculum. Otherwise these things that vitally matter to the Christian life, ministry and its training are excluded in the process of training for the ministry.

Attention will now be directed towards the popular professional or 'clerical paradigm'.

ASSESSING THE PROFESSIONAL PARADIGM IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The thorough-going professional paradigm—whether in the seminary or in its other derivatives—spelled a retreat at one time from the arena of formal education, which was the modern university. The recovery of true *theologia* in form of the original practical *habitus* (whether as a personal disposition towards God, or as informal self education, or as learned piety) must not be sought by way of another retreat from the present arena of formal training of the ministry as it appears some are advocating.[37] The twentieth century form of the 'clerical paradigm' is a relative new comer in the long history of training of the ministry within the locus of formal training. Its criticism, therefore, especially in terms of the mere focus on clerical tasks (doing) is well justified. Placing doing before being is like placing the cart before the horse in the light of the biblical pattern set forth especially by our Lord in his approach to training for ministry. The criticism that it is fragmented into 'catalogue fields' is equally justified. Its rationale, therefore, is not to be found in authentic *theologia* but in its presumed power to train for discrete tasks of the ministry while holding on to the four-fold pattern which is not the theory of its presumed practice. If the original practical *habitus* is recaptured as the goal of the training as the formal, non-formal, and the informal modes are combined, a much more unified concept of theological education might result.

So what we are saying is that the real issue on the recovery of *theologia* in theological education is not necessarily about adding more 'practicals' to the curriculum, if by that is meant the 'how-to's of ministry'. Practical training of course is essential, but not as an

ordination of the psyche and motor skills. The inter-connection of the domains is thus clearly demonstrated in this 'skills' area that requires more overtly the ability to process information and to articulate the same in the course of 'practice'.

[36] 36. For a significant report of the cooperation between church and school in the training of the ministry, see Tim Dearborn, 'Preparing New Leaders for the Church of the Future,' *Transformation*, vol. 12, No. 4, 1995, pp. 7–12.

[37] 37. John Frame (op. cit., p. 378) proposed the dropping of the 'academy' in place of a 'non-academy' model (p. 379). Such he calls 'Christian community' that will involve different models served by different 'Christian communities'. Those 'communities' will then specialise in the different areas of training of the ministry. Some will train in the formal theological subject areas; others will then train for the different forms of expertise in scholarly disciplines, and so forth.

appendage to what is considered of true importance. Authentic *theologia* in the training of the ministry concerns first and foremost 'practice' in terms of the Christian life and existence, even the life of Christ, or Christ-likeness. Practicals can then follow as a by-product of the making of the man/ woman of God. We are not saying either that the addition as a mere appendage of 'practice' in terms of the Christian life is the solution. Rather, this view of 'practice' must pervade the entire course of study.

The presence of authentic Christian faith and its nurture in the whole process cannot be over-emphasised. Genuine Christian faith is foundational in the recovery of authentic *theologia* in the tradition set forth by our Lord, namely as practical *habitus*. It is interesting to note that Farley posits a post-orthodox view of *theologia* and of faith itself.[38] He notes that the 'demise' of *theologia* carried with it the discrediting of Christian orthodoxy as well. But we would ask, where else can historic Christian faith reside? To the extent that our interpretation of Christian faith as revealed in Scripture is true to its primitive and original form, we remain potentially in line with authentic *theologia*. If on the contrary the 'faith' we profess deviates from the original revelation, we are not only in a post-orthodox era, but we are also in an era of confusion as already reflected in the various forms into which the curriculum of training of the ministry has been fragmented. We are in no doubt that a 'revisionist faith' as Farley posits is not only responsible in large measure for the loss of *theologia* in theological education and the fragmentation of the same, but that 'revisionist faith' is not going to lead to the recovery of authentic *theologia* in the training for the ministry. The apparent discrediting of the 'source-to-application' approach by Farley goes hand-in-hand with the loss of *theologia* itself, and history amply bears this out.[39]

Equally important is the relating of the four-fold pattern to the twentieth century form of the 'clerical paradigm' in the attempt at the recovery of authentic *theologia*. Necessary for this recovery is the Pauline pattern of the 'deposit' as originally given. Equally necessary for recovery of authentic *theologia* is the reaffirmation that the 'deposit' has the character of divine revelation. Any discrediting of this 'deposit-of-revelation' carries with it the loss of authentic *theologia*, as history has shown.[40] But mention must be made of how the four-fold pattern is employed even among those schools still faithful to the 'deposit-of-revelation'. The correlation of the four-fold pattern with clerical tasks calls for scrutiny. Usually, the task in view is the ability to teach to others what has been taught in the course of training. Hopefully those so taught will teach the same to others also. Appeal is often made to Paul's injunction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2.

In the first place, much of what is given attention in the course of training by way of the four-fold pattern does not seem relevant for teaching to others in the faith community and so it does not get passed on directly to the recipient faith community by graduates of

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[38] 38. Farley, op. cit., p. 161.

[39] 39. Farley mentions 'source-to-application' in terms of the practice of moving from a disclosed knowledge of what he calls the depositum of revelation (or the Scripture) to the application of that 'deposit'. This practice, he says, is not only precritical but it separates theory and practice (Farley, op. cit., pp. 136, 143, 162f.). While the criticism of the dichotomy of theory and practice is well taken, we cannot but note Farley's questioning of the authority inherent in the text (p. 144) as historic orthodoxy has maintained.

[40] 40. Farley refers to 'deposit-of-revelation' in terms of the Bible as a 'deposit' of divinely revealed truths, the ground of theology. Thus the 'deposit' serves to exhibit truths of revelation as grounded in the textual deposit. Farley goes on to say this approach to the text is equally precritical. He further says this approach has given way to a radical alteration of theological and churchly activities in a post-Enlightenment world view that has radically reinterpreted faith itself, the Christian life, and so forth. No wonder then the result is the 'absence of any clear consensus about how one makes or grounds judgments theologically' (Farley, op. cit., p. 143).

the school. Instead, what usually gets passed on is the teaching of the Bible texts in the form of homilies, expositions and Bible study in the belief that verbal application (which remains at the purely cognitive level) will somehow be translated into life (or action) by the faithful hearers. Thus much of the study around the Bible that characterises the four-fold pattern fails to be passed on to 'faithful men who in turn will teach others also'.

Secondly, there is a perception that what is learned in school (when correlated with the 'deposit') serves the function of the clerical task by developing the ability to teach others. However, unless care is taken, too much may be expected of this perception. We say this because the functionalist form of the 'clerical paradigm' takes the techniques of ministry (viz., the ability to preach, to teach, and to apply the Word for therapeutic purposes) as the end to which training is designed. But in this case there is no direct correlation between what is learned in school and the techniques required in doing ministry. The pattern set forth by our Lord and so ably followed by Paul did not place emphasis on the need to acquire knowledge merely by processing information with a view to mastering techniques for passing on a body of knowledge to others. Instead, this pattern primarily enjoins teachers and learners first of all to experience the truth of the 'deposit' in terms of personal life transformation in Christlikeness.

The functions of the ministry, though important, are not the end sought, but they are the necessary by-products. How to give priority to the important matter, namely the recovery of the original practical *habitus*, will probably differ from case to case. However what seems obviously necessary is the need to create space in the curriculum for the inclusion of the practical *habitus*, not as a mere appendage to the four-fold pattern that is already entrenched— but as a full-fledged discipline and as one that is integrated into the existing four-fold division. (Compare Fig. 4 which assumes a proportional distribution of the four-fold division only for illustrative purposes with Fig. 5.) The implication then is the need to reduce space currently occupied in the school curriculum by the four-fold pattern in order for the practical *habitus* to take its rightful place. The space created for this vital division should address the unity and core of the curriculum by combining aspects of the formal, non-formal, and informal modes. At least three vital areas are suggested below.

Dogmatics	Biblical Studies
Practical Theology	Church History

Fig 4. The Existing Four-Fold Division

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|           |           |           |
| Dogmatics |         (Space)       |
|   Practical          |            |
|   Theology           | Biblical   |
|           |          | Studies    |
| (Space)   |          |            |
|           |  Church  |            |
|           | History  |  (Space)   |
|_____|_____|_____|
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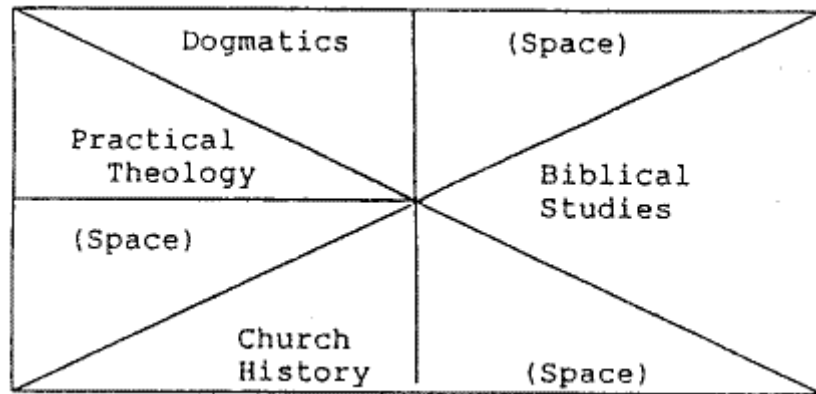
Fig 5. Creating Space Within the Four-Fold Division

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING THE THEOLOGICAL COURSE OF STUDY

Firstly we would suggest the introduction into the curriculum of theological propaedeutics which give at the beginning of the course of study the big picture of the components of training, the core of the training programme and the inter-relationships of the various elements. This overview will reveal the *ratio studiorum* as well as the ideals espoused in the course of study.[41] It will equally set forth the philosophy of training for the ministry as well as how the practical *habitus* is integrated into the entire course of study.

Secondly, we would suggest an ecclesial component of this *habitus* to cover (in the formal, non-formal and informal modes) the following important questions: what the church is—its nature, purpose, tasks; what ministry is—including aspects of the grace gifts in the Body of Christ and ascertaining what those gifts are in the individual lives of trainees for ministry; what the ministerial offices are, and the functional relationships of those offices to the Triune God.

Already ecclesiology is a component of the four-fold division in the purely formal mode, but that is usually done in a strictly compartmentalised form that divides the 'theoretical' from the 'practical'. That way the supposed 'theory' of the church is consigned to the region of dogmatics while its supposed 'practice' is reserved for the practical theology division. What I am suggesting here is the integration of what obviously belongs together, namely, the broadening of the ecclesial component to cover the ministries and its offices, and developing in trainees a biblical and theological understanding of ministry and the minister in relation to the Triune God and fellow man.

All of these would be packaged into one continuous learning experience in and out of the classroom in cooperation between teachers and trainers in the school and in the faith community. These will all work in concert to provide an ecclesial understanding, both propositionally and in life settings that allow for mentoring, learning by firsthand experience and observing live models.

Thirdly is what I call the relational component of this *habitus*. It has been pointed out that the practical *habitus* has to do with the Christian life and existence, with character and development of Christian virtues, with how to relate to God and man. This is the area often elusive in the strictly formal mode of training. It is a component that is more largely

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[41] 41. Theological propaedeutics was well known in the German approach to the study of theology, particularly in the period when theological encyclopaedia dominated the theological landscape. That in itself potentially provided a vital forum for giving to students the big picture.

caught than taught. This is where a combination of the three modes of training vitally come together. The relational component would include the individual's inner life and relationship to the Triune God, involving the disciplines of ingesting the Word of God, prayer, meditation, obedience, penitence, the habit of 'walking with God' and enjoying him. This relational component should also involve the individual's outer life and relationships to the community of faith and to the world. To the community of faith the vital areas of how to cultivate reciprocal fellowship, care, love, service, human relations, and so forth must be part of the core curriculum. To the world at large training of the ministry must involve understanding of the 'mundane' issues of injustice in whatever form it takes in a local setting and globally, demonstration of God's love to the dying world, service to the world God so loved, developing human relations skills, understanding issues of inter-faith relationships, and so forth.

All of these should be directed towards understanding and exercising God's love, compassion and the prophetic role of the church in the world. These relational aspects could be approached in the purely cognitive and formal mode of training. In that way teaching and learning begin and end in the classroom and library. But the aspect just mentioned as relational could equally be approached holistically in and out of the classroom. Thus the contexts of learning must be deliberately contrived in partnership between school and church, and at times with the world.[42] In this holistic approach the role of the teacher extends beyond the traditional school setting. Also those who function as teachers include those traditionally so designated in the school context as well as others within the church setting and at times even from the larger society. This then would allow for mentoring and apprenticeship as trainees learn from models in and out of school settings in any of the disciplines of relationships mentioned above.

The pedagogy of training of the ministry that brings the original practical *habitus* to the fore in a relational component must ensure that trainees are equipped as facilitators of the Christian life and existence within the faith community. The prevalent pedagogy strives to produce those who will tell others, whether in teaching, preaching, or in therapeutic sessions. That pedagogy is very weak in producing facilitators who can empower the people of God to attain their potential—whether in terms of the Christian life and walk, or in terms of the work of service, or of doing the ministry. It is little wonder then that the prevalent pedagogy is geared towards turning the people of God into spectators as the minister tells them what they need to know. The recovery of the original practical *habitus* will ensure that trainees become facilitators as they first experience the life of Christ and as they facilitate the same in others within the context of pilgrimage in the world. This training in facilitation of the practical *habitus* will truly occur as school and church, and at times society, interface.

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[42] 42. Consult Robert W. Ferris, Renewal in Theological Education: Strategies for Change, (Wheaton, Ill.: The Billy Graham Center, 1990) for documentation of efforts around the world at renewal of training patterns that seek to be holistic and those that are exploring partnership between school and church in their efforts. My own field study of innovative patterns of training for ministry among a number of carefully selected institutions and programmes across Africa in 1996/7 also reveals the presence of some bold efforts at renewal. Notable cases observed at first hand in that study include the 'layered curriculum' at the Evangelical Bible Seminary of South Africa in Pietermaritzburg, Natal Province. The institution strives to implement a 'heads, hearts and hands' philosophy of training, while concurrently interfacing with church and community on issues relating to Christian life and existence in the real world. Another notable example comes from Christian Service College in Kumasi, Ghana, where a carefully contrived programme adopts elements of the formal, non-formal, and informal modes of training for the ministry. At the Theological College of Central Africa, Ndola, Zambia, I observed definite attempt at mentoring of students by faculty members in non-formal and informal settings. All these efforts are somehow addressing the relational dimension.

Of the three areas suggested, the last two, which exclude the propaedeutics, together constitute the practical *habitus*. These deal with an understanding of the nature and purpose of the ecclesial community and its relationship to God, self, and fellow man. These equally correlate positively with what ultimately matters to the life of the church and its leadership in the course of the Christian life, existence and ministry. How the two components will be arranged in terms of space within the curriculum is not here prescribed, as situations and conditions differ around the world. However, it is vital that the space so created and the configuration of the practical *habitus* (illustrated in Fig. 6) together with the traditional four-fold division (which is adjusted for space), must utilise a combination of the formal, non-formal and informal modes in the process of training for ministry.[43]
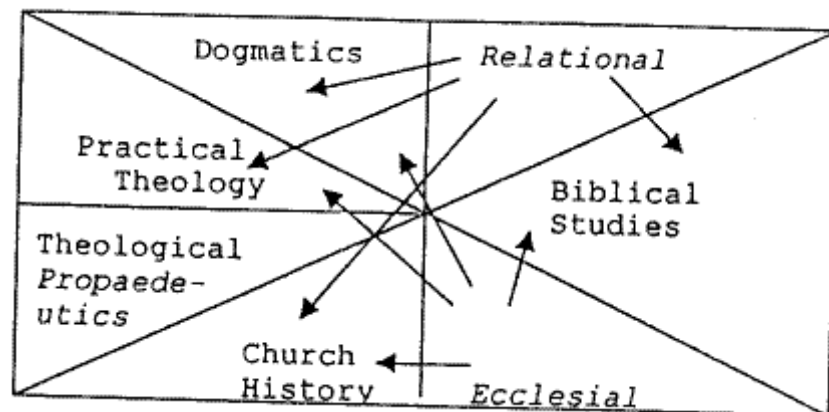

Fig. 6 Integrating the Practical habitus Within the Four-fold Division

FACULTY

Crucial to the success of the renewal of the theological school curriculum is the faculty whom I describe as 'train engineers'. Kelsey identifies two elements that form resistance to change as the faculty and the traditional ethos of a seminary.[44] Both of these are vitally inter-connected. School curricula have ways of perpetuation, and when resistance to

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[43] 43. The configuration employed in the illustration is just that. As illustrated in Fig. 6, 25% of the space is allocated to Biblical studies (Old and New Testaments), another 25% is allocated to the practical habitus (relational and ecclesial), while all else each gets 12.5% space. This however is not to suggest theological propaedeutics should necessarily occupy that much space, or that a neatly carved out proportional representation is being prescribed. Also this proposal might appear to suggest a six-fold division when theological propaedeutics and the practical habitus are added to the four-fold division. It might then be argued that theological propaedeutics is not a discipline, and rightly so. But it is a necessary aspect of the course of study which deserves a separate space while admitting it is not a discipline. It might also be argued that the existing discipline of 'practical theology' could be modified to serve the purpose of the practical habitus. But I would note the stark distinction between the two: while 'practical theology' is ostensibly geared towards techniques of ministry, the practical habitus is about the practical Christian life and existence, firstly on the vertical and horizontal lines of relationship, and secondly in terms of understanding of the church and its God-given mission. Subsuming the practical habitus under the existing 'practical theology' is also bound to deprive it of ownership. Who in the present set-up of things will take on the practical habitus while still attending to their own areas of interest? What I am(continued) calling for must therefore enlist both its own champions as well as the interest of others in the existing four-fold division who seek to integrate the practical habitus in their areas of interest.

[44] 44. Kelsey, op. cit., p. 39.

change happens, curricula eventually 'fossilise'.[45] Hence an ideal curriculum by itself cannot overcome the 'countervailing power' (Kelsey) of an unresponsive faculty who play a vital role in the making of the 'traditional ethos' of a theological school. That 'ethos' is the institutional culture that gets transmitted across generations. Kelsey sees in this culture a mixture of 'power relationships, patterns of behavior, and shared attitudes and dispositions'. Hence he says, 'The faculty's potentialities for change in the educational process are defined by its actuality and not by the ideal possibilities for change sketched by a new curriculum.' The totality of that 'actuality' involves a delicate balance between the explicit and implicit as well as the 'null' curricula of a theological school. This balance inevitably rests with the faculty who must be open to change through in-service training, interfacing with church and society, learning facilitation skills and teaching the same to their students, and above all, modelling the life of Christ before students.

A holistic approach to the curriculum of training of the ministry must employ a combination of the domains of learning with the different training outcomes of knowledge, character, and ministry skills. A delicate balance is called for in the training modes adopted and in the determination of the curricular core as well as the unity of the course of study. The philosophical underpinning that supports the perception of the ministry also supports the perception of the training outcome and consequently the curricular core.

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Doing Justice to Context in Theology: The Quest for a Christian Answer to the African Condition

Andrea M. Ng'weshemi

Keywords: contextualization, experience, poverty, dependence, debt, symbol, Christology

THE NATURE OF THEOLOGY

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[45] 45. Harold Benjamin has so ably pointed out how curriculum soon fossilises if unresponsive to change despite changing circumstances, in his satiric classic published under the pseudonym, J. Abner Peddiwell, *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., 1939).

The question, 'how can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out-of-date, speak meaningfully to human existence today'[1] presupposes the debate on the relevance of theology to any given context, in any given time and the part played by it in the experience of the world in which humans live. Defined as 'the construal of reality in the light of Christian symbols … a discipline that interprets all reality—human existence, society, history, the world, and God—in terms of the symbols of Christian faith,'[2] theology is in no way simply abstract God-talk. It is rather an effort to reflect critically on as well as to express in language what it indeed means to be enmeshed by God in the divine creative and redemptive process of living. As God-talk it involves interpretation of the way in which God is related to human beings as well as the divine participation in human efforts to establish a just and livable society. Theology therefore, requires a continuous contemporaneity in order for it to be relevant and legitimate. It

> talks about human life in the world, about life's deepest problems, struggles, defeats, and partial victories. It talks about what is really important in human life, about how human beings must live and behave, and about what choices they must make in order for their life to be genuinely human, fulfilling and humanizing.[3]

When theology fails to do this it ceases to be theology; instead it becomes doctrine or some form of ideology.

Relating theology to the context of present existence—the situation and consciousness of the world, church, (and the theologian) at any given time has been a point of emphasis and departure in the theological methods of certain theologians. In Paul Tillich's theological method of 'correlation'[4] for instance, two basic needs are satisfied: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth to every new generation. In this case, theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and its temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received. 'Situation' as one pole of all theological work refers to the philosophical, scientific, and artistic, the economic, political and ethical forms in which they express their interpretation of human existence. That is to say, the 'situation' theology must consider is the creative interpretation of existence, an interpretation which is carried on in every period of history under all conditions. The 'situation' to which theology must respond is the totality of the human being's creative self-interpretation in a special period. Put in other words, the Word of God (or Christian story as we shall later refer to it in this paper) does not invade our world in some capricious way. Rather, it comes as the answer to the fundamental questions posed by the reality of the world and by human existence. Tillich writes:

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[1] 1. Ted Peters, *God—the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 2.

[2] 2. Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 216.

[3] 3. Simon S. Maimela, 'Towards A Theology of Humanization,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* no. 41 (December 1982), p. 58.

[4] 4. See Paul Tillich's full perspective discussion of the method of correlation in his *Systematic Theology* vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 59–65.

> In using the method of correlation, systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to those questions.[5]

Also emphasizing common human experience as the starting point of any meaningful theologizing is David Tracy[6] who suggests that a people's experience brings its own dynamism as it relies upon images, conventions and symbolism of language as means of communication and interpretation. If the definition of theology is 'faith seeking understanding', then such definition realizes that faith is a constitutive element in understanding and experience. Hence common human experience and language establish a base for understanding to draw its life whereas the norm by which experience is measured is found in sacred scriptures.[7] Whereas Christian texts serve as the norm for all Christian interpretations, the theological task becomes the critical correlating of both common human experience and language with Christian texts in mutual relationship.

In John Macquarrie's thought, humanity's major problem is to find God in this world which implies looking for God in everyday situations. As such, human experiences provide relevant subject matters for theology. Theology not only has to interpret experience but also to respond to it. If theology cannot address the pain and frustration of modern people then it will have nothing to say about the world. As a matter of emphasis the relevance of theology therefore lies in its ability to address the realities faced by human beings in a given situation and time. This means that theology does not depend on itself, its own history, or isolated questions, but that it has to look for the existential situation of people whom it serves as the meeting place with God. Obedient to his own existentialontological method, John Macquarrie points out that for theology to be intelligible it has to use the language of the culture within which it is undertaken. No one can escape sharing in the mentality or intellectual climate of one's own culture, and to seek to do so is to deceive oneself 'for these influences will operate unconsciously'.[8]

Agreeing with the above view points as regards the emphases of taking a people's experience, condition, and questions asked by them in theological methods, this paper seeks to show that the current African condition and the life experience of African people together provide a context which theology needs to correlate with the Christian story. When this is done, a certain attitude or behaviour and option are called for which not only provide a theological position but also lead to more life possibilities on the part of God's people.

INTRODUCING THE AFRICAN CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCE

The historical reality, condition, and/or experience of Africa[9] is characterized by hopelessness and misery, by anxiety and despair, by fear and depression, by anger and confusion. African reality is an overturned culture, a diverted and distorted human self understanding. The many and various forms of injustice which Africans continue to suffer point to two things: a threatened life and distortion of their identity (and ultimately their

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[5] 5. Ibid. p. 60.

[6] 6. See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 64–87.

[7] 7. Ibid. p. 73.

[8] 8. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), p. 21.

[9] 9. Throughout this study the terms 'Africa' and 'African' will refer specifically to Africa south of the Sahara desert sometimes known as 'Black Africa.'

destiny) by caricatures of death. Engelbert Mveng has correctly summarized the African experience as the African 'anthropological poverty'[10] by which he means a denial or absence of all that contributes to the 'being, essence, and dignity of the human person',[11] that which makes one human culturally, socially, economically, politically and spiritually. This is the effect of the many years of domination which Africa has gone through under western hegemony for most its modern history.

The historical reality of Africa and the experience of African people has given rise to the paradoxical question of what it means to be human. One can name many causes of this diversion, from slavery to colonialism and racism,[12] neocolonialism and missionary negation of African culture with almost all that it entails which enabled the African people to have their own identity and a sense of self understanding, and the suffering which result from corruption, nepotism, tribalism, and civil wars. This paper will dwell specifically on what this writer sees to be the most painful experience which Africans have been going through in all its severity and which is indeed dehumanizing. This is material or economic poverty.

Poverty itself means not to have; it means lack of income which leads persons to many other forms of vulnerability, losing their source of livelihood such as enough food, adequate housing, clean water, health care, creativity, their respect and eventually their freedom. As far as Africans are concerned, being poor means also losing control of their destiny individually and collectively. Poverty is violation of human dignity. It causes underdevelopment which leads to sickness and ultimately death. It defies and contradicts the purpose and destiny for which humankind was created. In the African context destiny is the total progression towards what humans were meant to become in this life which is to attain fulness of life, a life which is all in all. In this respect, it is undeniable that denying a people a meaningful and abundant life is tantamount to refusing to acknowledge their existence.

Now to speak of poverty and underdevelopment in Africa means to recognize the contemporary connection between exploitation and dependency which African countries are suffering at the hands of the developed, North Atlantic countries.

Poverty and most suffering which Africans are going through today are not part of the natural order or a result of individuals' failures. It has been pointed out over and over again that it is something that is caused by a system founded in injustice. The reasons for poverty lie in the relationship between the rich and the poor, the North and the South, the first world and the third world. Indeed, 'The poverty of some and the wealth of others spring from the same source,'[13] namely an imbalanced, unfair relationship that exists and which is fuelled by economic neo-colonialist strategies of the twentieth-century with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank acting as agents of the developed, industrialized North.

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[10] 10. Cited in Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University, 1988), p. 15.

[11] 11. Engelbert Mveng, 'Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,' in Rosino Gibellini, ed., *Paths of African Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 156.

[12] 12. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC.: Howard University Press, 1981) is a classic treatise on the way in which the current poverty and other forms of sufferings of African people have come into being.

[13] 13. Sarah White and Romy Tiongco, *Doing Theology and Development: Meeting the Challenge of Poverty* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1997), p. 63.

The relationship between the North and the South and the economic neo-colonialist project which is perpetuating poverty in Africa can be explained well through what is popularly known as the 'debt crisis.' This is a system which has locked the poor Africans and those in other third world countries into the very system that has impoverished them. Today it is camouflaged in what is called globalization. By definition, globalization is not just a matter of being able to communicate with every corner of the world by telephone, computer Internet or satellite television. It is also an economic neo-colonialist strategy which aims at and calls for free exchange, encouraging the setting of multinational firms in Africa. It also means and advocates turning the world into one market. Creditors such as the International Monetary Bank, the World Bank, and private banks vest interest in maintaining the integration of the poor countries into the international free-enterprise system, a process which ensures that 'an important percentage of money which normally would have remained in Africa finds its way to American and European banks'.[14] Loans therefore are tied to certain policies that ensure continued integration. It seeks to ensure that the poor countries continue to expand their exports.

Inasmuch as most if not all sub-Sahara African economies have been geared since the colonial era to produce raw materials for the developed, industrialized countries, this means more emphasis must be given to export agriculture rather than food production for local consumption; economic production in general is geared to international rather than domestic markets. Moreover, due to the economic crisis of the 1980s which forced African countries to depend on foreign economic assistance, loans are conditional upon wage and employment reductions and price increases for basic goods and services. This has caused a reduction in the purchasing power of the workers, not to mention the peasants. With reduced wages another serious social problem has evolved: corruption which became an alternative way of filling in the gaps left by insufficient wages. Conditions are also laid down about how the money loaned by the international monetary bodies to African countries should be used and how the economies of the debtor countries should be adjusted. This process is popularly known as the Structural Adjustment Program.

The structural adjustments usually include privatization, the selling off of government owned enterprises, and cutting back on what the loaning agencies characterize as 'unprofitable' programmes like housing, welfare, healthcare and education which have relatively benefited the majority poor who otherwise could not afford such services. As African countries have almost reached a point of inability to settle their external debts while at the same time they continue to borrow, the overall result of loans and the Structural Adjustment Programs is that rich countries become richer and richer, and the poor countries poorer and poorer. This is the case mainly because the Structural Adjustment Programs themselves are grounded on a principle of covetousness designed by the affluent and powerful countries without the approval of the people in Africa and their governments.[15]

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[14] 14. Jose B. Chipenda et al., *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction* (Nairobi, Kenya: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1991), p. 9.

[15] 15. Referring to the article 'UNICEF Challenges World Bank in Africa,' which appeared in *Daily News* (Feb. 6, 1993), p. 19, Rogate Mshana in 'Economic Neocolonialism Through Structural Adjustment Programs in Africa: A Cry for Economic Justice,' *A Just Africa: Ethics and the Economy*, ed. Virgo Mortensen, (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), p. 84 presents conclusions of a UNICEF study that suggests that 'one of the biggest problems in Africa was that the SAPs emphasized a boosting of the production of primary commodities for export such as cocoa, coffee, and uranium. Food consumption was a low priority. As a result when international prices tumbled, partly because of the abundance of new producers, the African countries found themselves in the difficult position of having little foreign currency, little food, but a heavy debt.'

At a glance, here is a picture of the burden of indebtedness. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that 1991 debt for all of Africa was US $280 billion. The debt of Sub-Sahara Africa (i.e. countries south of the Sahara desert excluding South Africa) rose from $154.7 billions in 1989 to $175.8 billions in 1991. This is despite cancellation of $6 billions in debt. The US government cancelled hundreds of millions of dollars in African debt as a result of 1989 and 1990 legislation supported by US anti-hunger groups such as Bread for the World. But sub-Saharan Africa's 1991 debt service obligation was still $10.7 billions which is ironically equivalent to 20% of export earnings. By the year 1992, Africa's total debt had soared up to US$ 290 billion, 10 billion more than in 1991. Presently, Tanzania's total debt is $6.8 billion which works out at US$ 229 for each Tanzanian while the gross domestic product (GDP) per person is merely US$110 per year.[16] One when one considers how the Tanzanian is made to pay all of his/her annual income to service a foreign debt, the question arises—how will one survive? The situation is made worse when these very people who are made to give away their whole income to settle endless debts are now made to pay for almost every service at prices that are determined by the free market and which are becoming higher and higher. A very obvious example here is education. The annual cost of education in a government owned school currently is well over $100 per year per child. Costs for medical services are even higher. It is reported that in Ghana, the introduction of fees in hospitals has led to a drop of 50% in outpatient attendance in some rural areas. Due to ascending costs of health services in 1987/88, 45% of all sick Ghanaians did not seek any sort of medical assistance.[17] A World Bank report summarizes the plight of African persons:

> Africa spends four times more on debt servicing than it does on all the health services it provides its 600 million people. It is not surprising, therefore, that a single African country, Mozambique, loses more children to malnutrition and easily preventable or curable diseases than do all struggling countries of the former Soviet Union.[18]

Indeed, this situation is not very encouraging. For Africans, the consequence of poverty, indebtedness, dependency and continued integration into the international free enterprise system including trade patterns is just like what Job describes:

> They gather their fodder in the field and they glean the vineyard of the wicked one. They go about naked, without clothing; hungry. They carry sheaves; among the olive rows of the wicked, they make oil: they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst (Job 24:6, 10–11).

The unjust world economic order continues to make African people existentially poorer and poorer, and more and more dependent. As such, they are deprived of what they have, what they are, and what they do. Their existence is continually dictated by other people and nations that regard themselves as powerful. Now this is anthropological pauperization par excellence. Anthropological pauperization rises when people are deprived of their identity, their dignity, and all other essential rights that would make them more human, and instead, subjected to suffering, dehumanization, exploitation, denial of the meaningful and abundant life. Looked at very critically, the poverty which

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[16] 16. *Lutheran World Information* no. 2 (1977), p. 12.

[17] 17. Rolph van Der Hoeven, 'Adjustment with a Human Face: Still Relevant or overtaken by events', in *World Development*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1991):1835–1845.

[18] 18. Adopted from Laurenti Magesa, 'The African "Debt" Crisis in A Christian Perspective: An Analysis and an Approach to a Resolution', in *A Just Africa: Ethics and the Economy*, 156. Magesa's source is Africa Recovery Unit, *African Debt Crisis: A Continuing Impediment to Development* (New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1993).

engulfs Africans is an imposed, a created reality which is in fact not meant for the human person; as Karl Marx once pointed out:

> Not to have is not a mere disconsolate reality: today the (one) who has nothing is nothing, for (one) is cut from existence. In general and still more from human existence … not to have is the most desperate Spiritualism, a complete unreality of the human, a complete reality of the dehumanized.[19]

When it reaches this point, poverty which ontologically is not part of human nature becomes a threat and enemy to human life. Indeed it is a sinful condition since it negates the true essence of humanity. Now when this sinful condition is forcefully applied and made part of life of a people, such people will not avoid asking the question: what does it mean to be human?

ENGAGING THE CHRISTIAN STORY

The shortest theological description one can give to the African condition is that it is characterized by an ethos and structures that manifest and actualize the power of sin. They cause sin by making it exceedingly difficult for men and women to lead the life that is rightfully theirs as sons and daughters of God.

But it goes without saying that at the centre of the Christian story is the confidence that God responds redemptively to the whole scope of human exigencies. The presupposition is that God has the power as well as the will to redeem.

The Christian story is about the kingdom of God which in the person of Jesus, and according to his teaching, was breaking into history in a new and decisive way. Jesus' actions themselves reflected the kingdom as he called people to faith by creating a new situation: he healed the sick, forgave sins, fed the hungry, and announced his mission in terms of jubilee: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord our God'.[20]

In announcing the kingdom and the importance of creating an order within which people would be more human, Jesus committed his life to service in God's kingdom, thereby opening up new possibilities for all. No longer should the poor and hungry and weak be resigned to their fate, nor the rich and powerful bound by their wealth and power be bound to injustice.

The Christian story has it that Jesus is the Son of God.[21] Admittedly, this is a statement of profound hope, for through the resurrection God indicated that the locus of Christian faith and action is human history. As such, the gap between realization of the kingdom and the cross (which is so much evidence in Africa of injustice and poverty) is not a legitimate reason for hopelessness or despair. God's incarnation in Jesus offers special value to life in general and to human existence in particular: it gives value to the earth and to the entire creation.

Notably, the meaning of the history of salvation and human's role in it is nowhere more fully revealed than in the person of Jesus the Christ. Jesus preached both the presence and

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[19] 19. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique* (Moscow: Foreign Languages, 1956), p. 59.

[20] 20. Lk. 4:18–19.

[21] 21. Jn. 20:31.

the coming of a radically new world order, the kingdom of God. The growth of the kingdom, he announced, was occurring in history and would come in all its fullness as a gift from God at the end of history. The kingdom of which Jesus spoke was one of peace, justice, and love. It meant the end of all hatred, oppression in all forms—in the fullest sense of the word, and human misery.

The promise of the kingdom is the promise of salvation—communion with one another and with God. Jesus revealed that salvation is mediated through our neighbour, particularly through the poor, the marginalized, the exploited, the belittled and despised by this world, those who are dehumanized and who do not have an assurance of life in its fullness, those whose existence in this world is threatened by forces that are far beyond their control. Jesus taught that it is only by loving them that we can love God and thus be saved.

Following that, the Christian story as good news comforts. It also empowers, granting people the right of existence in the hope that the new life of Christ will take over within and through them. The hope that Africans will have lies in the essence of the gospel whose story is of God's self-emptying to identify with humanity. Through the incarnation, God puts on the title of the suffering servant, dying on behalf of humanity to defeat sin and all forms of evil which contradict the dignity of the human being whom Christianity teaches is created in God's image. The gospel, therefore, offers us hope and awareness that God understands and identifies with the suffering ones.

Since poverty is a disgrace, a distortion of the dignity and humanity of the human person, it is abnormal. Jesus himself experienced poverty and humiliation, even death. But because poverty and death are not what humanity is created for, God raised Christ, restoring to him not only life but also dignity. In the person of Jesus, God promises to be not only with God's people but particularly on the side of the disrespected and dehumanized.

A QUEST FOR A CHRIST SYMBOL

Gordon Kaufman contends that theology has always taken place in a socio-cultural context, each context itself being a modification of previous imaginative constructions. Hence theology in every period is the ongoing attempt to make sense of life's basic elements. Theology in our time, therefore, imaginatively reconstructs our ancestral images to meet the needs of contemporary life. The task of theologians is to construct conceptions 'appropriate for the orientation of contemporary human life'.[22] This in turn will enable each generation to have concepts that are workable for human life in the world and which may draw human beings much closer to the divine presence. This is to say that a theological construct may be workable only if it leads to 'fruitful life, in the broadest and fullest and most comprehensive sense possible', one by which theologians will make available new possibilities, 'raising new hopes, enabling men and women to move to new levels of humanness, instead of closing off options and restricting and inhibiting growth into a fuller humanity'.[23] Now given the African context and the experience of men and women in that continent, the one pertinent question that cannot be avoided is: who is Jesus Christ for the suffering people in that part of the world?

What we learn from the Christian story leads us to seeing Jesus as both the presence and revelation of the truly fully human. In the words of Bonhoeffer,

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[22] 22. Gordon Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 31.

[23] 23. Ibid. pp. 71–72.

It is from the real human being, whose name is Jesus Christ, that all factual reality derives its ultimate annulment (*aufhebung*), its justification and its ultimate contradiction (*widerspruch*), its ultimate affirmation and its ultimate negation ... In Jesus Christ, the real man, the whole of reality is taken up and comprised together, in him it has its origin, its essence and its goal.[24]

Admittedly, we humans 'learn about God from Jesus,' and also 'about our own being and its possibilities and true destiny'.[25] He is the full embodiment of authentic humanity, and one who is the archetypal human being whom humanity should be like in its essential quality.

Jesus who is the bearer of the new humanity strikes a kinship and existential note to which Africans resonate. In African traditional thought life is central, and faith is expressed through day-to-day encounter with the challenges of life. In this framework Jesus emerges as 'Proto-ancestor' who imparts life force to human beings in its fullness. The 'Proto-ancestor' gives life and nourishes it 'in order to restore the energy of those who believe in Him'.[26] Just as he is presented in the gospel stories as one who is concerned with the welfare of those who are in need, he is Saviour from misfortunes, sufferings and death. He is *Mkombozi*, Liberator from oppression, poverty and fear, and from all the forces that keep the human being from becoming what God intended one to become. Through his word and deed, he calls people to freedom in every aspect. As such, for the African, the reality of Jesus brings with it the possibility of restored wholeness in health, dignity, justice, and love. In short, through his life, death and resurrection Jesus fulfills the humanizing process of which Africans are in need. The acquisition of new humanity through faith in Jesus enables them to find their selfhood and become truly self-determining. Ultimately, it is this identity with Christ that makes economic, social, and political changes meaningful and humanizing.

Jesus purifies that human aspect which has been distorted; he takes back humanity to its right place: the number one position in God's creation. Therefore in an attempt to regain dignity, it will be necessary to remember that Jesus Christ is the way in which God freely brings about humanity's self transcendence in Godself. Jesus Christ is the realization and the manifestation of the true reality of humanity. Through the incarnation, Jesus is the best design of the highest possibility of humanity and in reference to him only can we understand what it means to be 'human' at all. The truth of Christ is the summit and conclusion of God's work in creation, the most exalted radical and unique actualization of the ultimate possibility of the human nature. Truly Jesus Christ was, and still is the only one who will save, liberate, and restore the meaningfulness and humanness of Africans, leading them to authentic humanity.

Recognizing this means several things: first, in the person and ministry of Jesus is an assurance that he is in solidarity with the suffering ones. In this connection, one can speak of Christ's contemporary presence not simply in human form, but above all in the scandalous and concealed form of humiliation in the likeness of sinful flesh ([Rom. 8:3](#)). As such, in the church where the sermon is a form of the present Christ, the claim that 'the proclaimed Christ is the real Christ' implies that Christ is present not by repeated incarnation, but rather by the humiliation of appearing in lowly form. Second, since Jesus

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[24] 24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. Trans. N.H. Smith (London: Collins, 1964), p. 299.

[25] 25. Monika K. Hellwig, 'Christology', in D.W. Musser and J.L. Price, eds., *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 87.

[26] 26. Benezet Bujo, 'The Two Sources of Life: The Eucharist and the Cult of Ancestors in Africa', *African Christian Studies* Vol. 2 No. 1 (July 1986), p. 74.

wills that humans attain life in its fullness, all efforts and struggles to diminish poverty and to prevent untimely death among millions of Africans are justified. Third, Jesus Christ calls upon all those who believe in him to rally behind and support him in his efforts to create a just world in which the well-being of all will be assured.

CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The question about what it means to be human as it is posed by Africans provides the kernel of the condition which methodologically is the context which theology ought to be aware of as it seeks to make itself relevant to African people. Given the experience of poverty and other forms of injustice, Africans need to hear what the gospel says about them. Indeed they want to hear the gospel, the message of which is centred on the human person whom the various types of afflictions render less human. It is the task of theology to verify that 'the Good News is really good, that it really does bring life and hope to people, that it really does bring them peace and justice, that it really does gather people in the forgiveness of God'.[27]

Since theology is traditionally understood to be at the service of the church,[28] the church brings or ought to bring something new, something specific to the continent of Africa where human beings are tirelessly seeking to restore their humanity and self-understanding. Its contribution should be seen in light of its prophetic message, namely the need for restoration of humanity. Besides the traditional functions of teaching and teaching, the church is called upon to take the lead in raising the much needed critical voice against dehumanizing and unjust social-economic structures. As the body of Christ, the church is a commissioned agent and articulator of Christ's work of liberation. As such, so long as the church truly represents the living Christ, any utterance concerning human being will be justified only if it entails an act of emancipation, an act of commitment to the liberation and restoration of the dehumanized, humiliated, depersonalized and threatened human being. The church is challenged to facilitate a possibility for African people to experience life in abundance. To do this, it is called to take part in seeking a source of effective solution and strength for the threatened masses as they struggle to overcome all that endangers their individual and collective survival. It should help them to transform their situation and hence create a better, livable and just society.

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Expository Preaching in a Postmodern World

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[27] 27. Aylward Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), p. 16.

[28] 28. At least in the Barthian sense.

Roy Clements

INTRODUCTION

Evidence is mounting of a growing disillusionment with *expository* preaching. In *Picking up the Pieces*[1] David Hilborn has recently argued that exposition is a feature of Enlightenment modernity and quotes a number of contemporary evangelical leaders who are convinced that 'the expository age' is coming to an end. New methods of evangelism and new styles of worship must be developed if the church is not to suffer the fate of a maladapted dinosaur in the postmodern cultural environment which increasingly dominates the western world. Preaching is likely to occupy a much less privileged place in that new pattern.

THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

A major change in western culture is certainly taking place and epistemology lies at the root of it. Modern thought is based on the presupposition that there is an absolute reality external to the human mind, and that the rational processes of the mind are sufficiently congruent with that reality to give us reliable knowledge of it. Such knowledge is the business of science. In fact, positivists insist that anything which cannot be verified by the rigorous methods of science is not knowledge at all, but opinion. The boundary between the domains of objective 'facts' and subjective 'feelings' is a fundamental characteristic of the philosophy that has shaped European culture since the Enlightenment.

As time has gone by, however, more and more areas of human thought and experience have been relegated to the latter category. Theology was consigned there first. Aesthetics, ethics and history have followed. In the middle of this century question marks began to be placed by writers like Thomas Kuhn against the objectivity of science itself. Was the scientist discovering immutable 'laws of nature' or merely inventing descriptive paradigms? And most recently, under the assault of deconstructionist literary criticism,[2] doubt has been expressed about the objectivity of language. This general drift towards subjectivism has resulted in an emphasis on image over against words, on feelings over against concepts, and on intuition over against logic.

The emergence of virtual reality in the computer world is symbolic of the way in which the boundary between the external world of public facts and the inner world of private perceptions has been blurred by this erosion of cognitive certainty. Truth is increasingly regarded as something self-manufactured and provisional. Postmodernity rejects all tyrannical meta-narratives and offers instead the philosophical equivalent of LEGOLAND, in which everyone is free to gather whatever pieces they like and build them into their own do-it-yourself Disneytruth to play with.

EXPOSITORY PREACHING UNDER ATTACK IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

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[1] 1. David Hilborn, *Picking up the Pieces*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1997.

[2] 2. See Michael Ovey, 'Deconstruction: Gagging the speaking God?' *Cambridge Papers*, 1993, Vol. 2, No. 4.

It is easy to see why David Hilborn suggests that exposition may have to be abandoned in this new cultural situation. He identifies several charges which postmoderns will lay against it.

First, expository preaching is **rationalistic**, pursuing a detailed analysis of the biblical text. But postmoderns are impatient with that kind of mental discipline. They are interested in emotive images not cerebral ideas, personal experiences not Greek verbs.

Secondly, expository preaching is **elitist**. It appeals only to intellectuals who have the concentration span and linear logic to benefit from it. Gerald Coates provocatively comments[3] that the intellectual demands of expository preaching exclude 95 per cent of the world's population. He observes that very few leaders in those parts of the worldwide church which are experiencing the most prolific growth employ expository preaching.

Thirdly, expository preaching is unacceptably **authoritarian**. Postmoderns wish to affirm the validity of all insights and emphases. A didactic monologue feels altogether too much like an assertion of power. Political correctness now requires an open listening attitude characterised by dialogue and consensus, rather than proclamation by a single individual in a clerical gown.

To cap it all, its opponents argue that expository preaching is **unbiblical**. In his matchless parables Jesus pioneered an alternative style of preaching which, by the vividness of its imagery and narrative style, is brilliantly adapted to the needs of our postmodern culture. The Christian communicator of the future, they insist, will have to display similar creativity.

These criticisms, however, are all open to challenge.

Reason and the Word

It is certainly true that western culture is less enamoured of rationalism than it once was. But are we really about to turn our backs on the gains of the scientific revolution and return to medieval myth and magic? Society today is hugely dependent on technology and the scientists who sustain it. It is significant that very few scientists buy into postmodern subjectivism, at least as far as their professional work is concerned. The majority are critical realists who retain a sanguine confidence in the correspondence of their models to objective reality.[4] Postmodernity will find it hard to convert this powerful lobby to its side. Talk of the abandonment of exposition for the sake of cultural relevance may well be premature. Postmoderns represent only one section of contemporary society and they have not yet carried the day.

Furthermore there are very good grounds for holding that the scientific method grew originally out of a biblical worldview. It is true that European culture has been significantly influenced during the last two centuries by an atheistic rationalism which has bequeathed a spiritual wasteland as its tragic legacy. But the answer is not to swing with the cultural pendulum into irrationalism or mysticism. Rather than surrender to such an anti-scientific backlash, a more strategic response on the part of Christian apologetics would be to embark on a spirited biblical defence of the proper place of reason in the construction of human knowledge.

It is vital in this connection to note the central role of the *Word* in the Bible. The majestic opening lines of John's gospel, with their affirmation of the primacy of the *Logos*, point to the profound significance of human language and reason. Notwithstanding the vast diversity of human culture, everybody uses and understands both *words* and *logic*.

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[3] 3. In D. Hilborn, op. cit.

[4] 4. See Denis Alexander, 'Science: Friend or foe?' *Cambridge Papers*, 1995, Vol. 4, No. 3.

Accordingly, the Bible consistently witnesses to a God who *speaks*, and is suspicious of the religious use of *images*. Without going to iconoclastic extremes or disparaging the visual arts,[5] the Bible insists that words are capable of a vital precision, enabling the listener to distinguish truth from lies and obedience from disobedience. Images, while they undoubtedly communicate powerfully at the emotional level, leave too much room for idolatrous speculation.

The anthropocentric subjectivism characteristic of postmodern thought is not new. It finds parallels in the religions and philosophies of ancient Greece and Asia. It was the objective divine Word that distinguished the biblical prophets and apostles from this pagan environment. The departing commission of Jesus himself to 'teach everything I commanded you'[6] would be unintelligible without access to such a normative verbal revelation. And in his valedictory warnings about intolerance of 'sound doctrine', disillusionment with 'truth' and preference for 'myths', Paul was anticipating precisely the kind of gnostic trend which postmodernity represents. Significantly, his response is to urge Timothy to 'preach the Word'.[7]

Is Exposition Elitist and Authoritarian?

Ever since the Reformation expository sermons have tended to appeal to educated audiences. Even among the Puritans, populist preachers often used a dramatic and emotionally-charged style of preaching which was very different from the carefully argued expository lectures that their colleagues presented in university chapels.[8] They were not unaware of the elitist tendency in their Word-centred theology. Their long-term response to the danger was to encourage universal literacy. Instead of a pragmatic surrender to popular culture, they aspired to redeem it.

Those who dismiss expository preaching because it is 'over the heads' of the majority are in danger of displaying the same kind of patronising attitude which kept the Bible as a clerical monopoly in the medieval church. Rather than collude with ignorance and superstition, reformed Christianity has always seen public education as part of its mission. In this connection, Gerald Coates' comment about revival is as naive as it is perceptive. The explosive growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America has certainly not been generated by expository preaching. But what will happen to that movement as the people become upwardly mobile and better educated? Evidence suggests that poorly taught revivalist churches lose as many adherents as they gain in such circumstances.[9]

As to the related allegation that expository preaching is authoritarian, any faith which confesses allegiance to a divine revelation is likely to be thus misunderstood. The learned philosophers of Greece found Paul's *kerygma* just as politically incorrect as any postmodern. But he does not soften the note of proclamation in order to accommodate himself to their Socratic presuppositions. It is his duty to 'command' repentance in the name of the God of whose message he was the herald.[10] No doubt there are ways of

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[5] 5. The story of Moses' brass serpent is perhaps intended both to affirm the role of image and to illustrate its dangers.

[6] 6. Matt. 28:20.

[7] 7. 2 Tim. 3:14–4:5.

[8] 8. See Francis Bremer and Ellen Rydell, 'Puritans in the Pulpit' in *History Today*, 1995, Vol. 45, pp. 5–54.

[9] 9. David Martin, 'Space for the expansive Spirit' in *Times Lit. Supp.*, 28 March 1997.

[10] 10. Acts 17:30; see also Paul's rejection of Hellenistic sophia in 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5.

communicating the authority of the gospel which do not unnecessarily inflame postmodern sensitivities. But the asymmetry between preacher and audience is not to be regarded as a dispensable cultural anachronism. It witnesses to the non-negotiable nature of the divine Word. The apostle Paul involved himself in dialogue only with the goal of persuading people of the truth of that Word, never as a capitulation to the pluralistic 'open-mindedness' of the pagan pantheon.

Is Exposition Biblical?

The suggestion that expository preaching is not to be found in the Bible itself is also only superficially plausible. Much of the time the apostles are self-consciously declaring new revelation[11] which in some respects stood in contrast to the religion of the Old Testament and relied upon their first-hand knowledge of Jesus and the gospel. This was a unique situation. How can later generations of Christians remain faithful to 'the faith once delivered to the saints' except by accurately expounding that apostolic deposit?[12]

Much of the preached material that is reported in the New Testament arises in an itinerant evangelistic context rather than that of a settled Christian congregation. Even so, gospels and epistles utilise biblical argument and they are not lacking in logical structure. It is significant that the letter to the Hebrews, which as a 'word of exhortation'[13] may well be a typical early church sermon, displays many of the marks of a piece of expository preaching, blending biblical interpretation and pastoral application. There are in fact four word ministries mentioned in the New Testament: proclamation (*kerygma*), teaching (*didache*), prophecy (*propheteia*), and exhortation (*paraklesis*). If exposition cannot be simplistically identified with any of these it is because its ambition is to embrace all four.

Jesus' use of parables is certainly a fascinating feature of his public teaching. But he taught in non-narrative ways too.[14] It is also significant that he adopted a much less opaque mode of instruction when he was with his disciples alone than with the general public.[15] More fundamentally, though, it is a mistake to think that expository preaching cannot make use of more imaginative homiletic techniques like parables. One of the major reasons exposition has a bad press these days is that many identify it with a style of preaching that is colourless and pedantic. But expository preaching is not primarily a matter of *style* at all. The thesis of this paper is that, first and foremost, the adjective 'expository' describes the method by which the preacher decides *what* to say, not *how* to say it.

THE DISTINCTIVES OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

The task facing any preacher is to fuse the 'two horizons' of the biblical text and the contemporary world in the experience of the listener.[16] The expository method is marked by two distinctives in this respect.

1. The expository method pays equal attention to both horizons

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[11] 11. Gal. 1:11.

[12] 12. 2 Tim. 1:13–14; 2:2 and Jude 3.

[13] 13. Heb. 13:22.

[14] 14. Eg. The Sermon on the Mount.

[15] 15. See Matt. 13:10–11.

[16] 16. John Stott, (*Between Two Worlds*, Eerdmans, 1982; A. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, Paternoster), 1980.

They receive equal consideration in preparation and equally inform the sermon when finally delivered. A sermon that concentrates wholly on contemporary problems or interests with only tangential reference to the text of Scripture, while it may count as preaching if it is seeking to communicate orthodox Christian truth, is not expository because the Bible is not sufficiently central to it. On the other hand, a sermon that concentrates wholly on the biblical text with little application to the contemporary scene is better termed exegetical rather than expository. An expository sermon must have a 'prophetic' dimension. It is a living word for a particular time and place, targetted onto the life situation of the audience.

2. The expository method begins with the biblical text

It would be possible of course to begin on the horizon of the contemporary world. This is precisely where topical preaching does begin. The preacher identifies some contemporary issue and scans the Bible for relevant material. Its weakness is that the world may control the agenda. Issues which the Bible wants to address, but to which our contemporary culture is insensitive, may well be filtered out of the curriculum by the sieve of its selective enquiry. It is the noble distinctive of expository preaching that it gives initiative to the Word. By its very methodology of beginning on the horizon of the biblical text it challenges the influence of human tradition and cultural assumption, exposing the church to continual reformation according to the Word of God.

Two Questions

The expository method consists of systematically asking two questions of each book, chapter and verse of the Bible:

(i). *what is the intention of the divine author in this text?*
(ii). *what is the relevance of this discovered divine intention to the contemporary situation?*

The first question deals with *meaning* and the second with *application*. The text, by the answers it provides to these two questions, sets the agenda for the sermon's content. How the structure and style of the sermon are then developed is a separate and secondary matter.

Can We Discover Objective Meaning in the Text?

One of the central tenets of postmodernity is that the meaning of a text is controlled by the reader. Thus, for a deconstructionist like Derrida, the first question posed by the expository method is fundamentally misguided. It is pointless to ask 'what does this text mean?' The only question we are empowered to ask is 'what does this text mean to me or my community?' We cannot read out of a text the author's intention. We can only read into a text our own subjective response.[17]

It is important that we do not fall into the trap of neurotic over-defensiveness here. Some of the literary genres used by the Bible do invite a high degree of reader involvement. It is part of the author's intention in telling a parable, for instance, to leave the text provocatively 'open'. Furthermore, the Christian community does have an important role in discerning the meaning of Scripture, and an untutored slave may well understand the Exodus narrative more profoundly than a Hebrew scholar.

However, it must also be said that, pressed to the extreme, postmodern literary criticism denies the very possibility of divine revelation through a verbally inspired text.

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[17] 17. For a more detailed treatment, see Michael Ovey, op. cit., and D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, (Zondervan, 1996).

Expository preaching challenges such scepticism. It insists that God successfully communicates through the Bible. True, words can be misunderstood and the cultural gap between the Bible and the modern reader increases the risk of such misunderstanding. But these admissions do not mean that there is no objective meaning in the text. No, words work—and God's words work best of all.

In so far as an expository sermon succeeds, then, it undermines a fundamental plank in the postmodern mindset. Its methodological commitment to seeking the intention of God in the biblical text stands against the subjectivism and polyvalency of deconstruction. It alerts the listener to the transcendental reality of a God who chooses to reveal himself through a Word. He may have turned a blind eye to the idolatrous speculations of subjective opinion and imagination in the past. But now he commands the whole human race to repent and obey that Word.

The Mental-Arithmetic Sermon

A preacher then may accommodate postmodern concerns too much. For instance, in one popular adaptation of the expository sermon, though the textual exegesis is done well, all evidence of it is deliberately hidden for fear of boring or exasperating the audience. The result is that, like someone who is brilliant at mental arithmetic, the preacher gives the right answer in terms of *application*, but neglects to show how the *meaning* of the text was arrived at. As a result the sermon sounds suspiciously subjective and arbitrary. The preacher does not seek to convince the listener that *this* reading of the text is a responsible one; and in failing to do so there is a danger of subtly reinforcing postmodern presuppositions.

For many today read their Bible as if it were a Zen text from which they get private mystical experiences and insights, without any consideration of whether these are appropriate or correct. A church fed on mental-arithmetic sermons will be ill-equipped to resist such trends. Expository preaching when it is done well has the side effect of developing good Bible-reading skills. By providing a model of rigorous interpretation, it educates the people of God in responsible hermeneutics. But this means taking time to explain to the audience not only what the text means but how we have come to that conclusion. It is no longer enough to feed our people. These days we must also show them how to cook.

HOW EXPOSITORY PREACHING MUST CHANGE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Nonetheless, in one respect postmodern concerns should enrich expository preaching. As we have seen, postmoderns are reacting against rationalism and wish to affirm the value of intuitive and subjective modes of human awareness. Arguably such a corrective reaction was necessary. Bryan Appleyard suggests that modern science has, quite literally, disenchanted our world, reducing all the mystery and magic of existence to molecular formulae and mathematical equations.[18] Although this is an exaggerated caricature, the general public perception of science today is more negative than it used to be. Postmoderns protest against the two-dimensional reductionism which technocracy seems to have fostered. They are suspicious of scientific materialism and open once again to 'spirituality'. But they demand subjective involvement with that spirituality rather than

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[18] 18. Bryan Appleyard, *Understanding the Present*, (Picador, 1992).

mere cerebral information about it. And expository preachers cannot speak with relevance to a postmodern audience unless they take this new situation to heart.

In this respect we must listen humbly to the criticism that expository preaching has been too wedded to rationalistic modes of interpretation. The intention of God in Scripture is certainly to impart objective knowledge of himself, but it goes far beyond that.[19] In addition to informing the mind, God seeks to address the will and the feelings. He may wish to encourage or to warn, to praise or to challenge; he may wish to make us weep, or laugh, or frown. The purpose of the imperative 'rejoice!' is not just to impart objective knowledge about joy, but to make the reader feel joyful! Any Bible exposition will have failed if it locates the intellectual content of the text, but neglects to communicate the emotional texture in which that content is embedded. Good exposition invites the listener to feel with the text as well as to think about it. The leaders of the evangelical revival in the eighteenth century broke away from arid and cerebral dissertations on divinity in order to preach to the heart. And in a postmodern culture we neglect that subjective dimension at our peril.

The Propositional Paraphrase Sermon

One type of sermon which easily fails to rise to this challenge seems at first sight to be close to the expository method. But it puts a different initial question to the text. Instead of asking 'what is the intention of God in this passage?' the preacher asks 'what doctrine does this passage teach?' or 'where does this passage fit in my biblical theology?' As a result the intention of the passage is reduced to a list of propositional statements— commonly three in number! This kind of preaching is not without its strengths. A sound theology is an indispensable aid to determining the canonical meaning of a text. It prevents the preacher ascribing to the text a meaning which would be contradictory to the plain meaning of other texts, and thus confirms that the Bible, in spite of its many human sources, is nevertheless one book with a single divine author and a coherent message.

However, by substituting 'doctrine' for 'intention' in the expository method, the propositional paraphrase sermon fails to seize the homiletic opportunity which a postmodern world presents. Such an approach is very likely to lack emotional engagement with the text. There will be little sensitivity to literary genre. Apocalyptic, poetry, narrative, parable, all are flattened to the prosaic level of a theology textbook. To analyse a biblical text into a few propositional points is potentially as reductionist as the chemist who says that Shakespeare's Macbeth is just paper with printing. Our propositional points may be true, but they ignore those aspects of the text which do not relate to cognitive knowledge. We have approached the text like a biologist dissecting a specimen and failed to relate to it in a fully personal way as a result.

A DANGER AND A CHALLENGE

Postmodernity, then, poses both a threat and an opportunity for expository preaching.

The threat is that under the pressure of its hostility to the disciplined application of reason, and its scepticism about the accessibility of ultimate Truth, the preacher may abandon exposition and go in search of other foci to public worship that seem more in tune with the culture. Within limits such a quest may be justified. Expository preaching is

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[19] 19. To use the semantic vocabulary developed by J.C. Austin and John Searle, speech not only conveys information, it has illocutionary force and purpose. See Kevin VanHoozer in (ed.) D.A. Carson & J.D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth*, (Baker, 1983).

certainly not the be-all and end-all of church life. Music and drama, liturgy and sacrament, *charisma* and *diakonia*, all have contributions to make as we seek to contextualise the Christian faith. But in its methodological reliance on the conviction that God has spoken intelligibly to our world, expository preaching is an indispensable weapon in the Church's testimony to Truth. Only careful attention to the normative Word will prevent contextualisation from turning into syncretism, and the search relevance becoming a slippery slope to compromise.

Postmodernity brings also a great opportunity: the opportunity for expository preaching to explore more fully the purpose of the biblical text. Too much Bible teaching in the past has felt like a catechism. God intends to communicate to the heart as well as the mind. The task of the expositor is to find ways to communicate that heart involvement to a world that is once again hungry for it. The opportunity awaits, in the twilight of modernity, to rediscover that integration of truth and passion which has always been the mark of real expository preaching. Martyn Lloyd-Jones rightly called it 'logic on fire!'

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Books Reviewed

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Peter Vardy
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Book Reviews

KIERKEGAARD
by Peter Vardy
(Fount, 1996, pb, 101 pp),
and
Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith
by George Pattison
(London: SPCK, 1997, pb 145 pp)

Reviewed by Dr Greg Restall, Department of Philosophy, Macquarie University, Sydney NSW

Soren Kierkegaard is an intriguing figure in the history of philosophy. Like Nietzsche, people have taken up his cause in the modern era in a new way, after a period of comparative obscurity. In his time he was primarily a critic and not a theorist developing a systematic philosophy or theology. For this reason, he, like Nietzsche, is considered as having something important to say to us in our pluralist, technocratic, postmodern society. That this is so is demonstrated in two different ways in two very different books on Kierkegaard.

Peter Vardy's *Kierkegaard*, is another helpful addition to the series, Fount Christian Thinkers. Vardy's book gives a short, clear introduction to the major lines of Kierkegaard's thought and its development. He skilfully guides the reader through the major lines of Kierkegaard's thought by explaining Kierkegaard's account of the 'stages on life's way'—the Aesthetic Stage, the Ethnical Stage, and the Religious Stage. These stages describe not only Kierkegaard's own life, from searching for Beauty, then for Goodness, and finally a relationship of faith with God; but also, at least according to Kierkegaard, this path describes the journey of every 'knight of faith'. It is the path of any who would have faith in God in this world in which faith is alien. Vardy sensitively covers this matter and gives a helpful account of how this story is to be found in Kierkegaard's works. (This is not a simple matter, as some of Kierkegaard's writings are pseudonymous, and it is by no means clear whether Kierkegaard himself intended everything written under these names to equally stand for his own commitments.)

George Pattison's book *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith* is a very different book, when compared to Vardy's. Pattison approaches Kierkegaard's works by topic. The book covers his work not by historical development, but by examining the things Kierkegaard has to say about different facets of our world. The guiding idea is expounded in the first chapter, which bears the name of the book 'Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith'. Pattison believes that Kierkegaard speaks volumes to us in the modern age, where faith is in question, where true Christianity is not widely known or seen, and in which the life of the Christian is truly characterized by crisis. For Kierkegaard, to be a Christian involves a crisis, a clash with the world and within the self. In Kierkegaard's time, this clash involves the dominant school of thought of the state Church in Denmark—Hegelian philosophy. For Pattison, the clash is different. In involves secularism, and the untenability of a naive realism in faith. The truly faithful must sail alone, holding to a faith in God, not construed in a naive realist way, but in a post-realist, post-secular, 'independent' way.

The rest of the book covers different aspects of Kierkegaard's thought in such a way as to make clear the applications to our age and our condition. Pattison skilfully covers issues in politics and society, philosophy, science and art.

These books complement one another nicely. Vardy's book does not spend much time examining the implications of Kierkegaard's thought for the modern world. For that, you

must use Pattison's book. But equally, Pattison's book does not give a succinct overview of Kierkegaard's thought in its own context. For that, Vardy's book is helpful. Together, these books give the reader a sure-footed overview of Kierkegaard's thought and its application to the modern world.

JESUS CHRIST: SAVIOUR AND LORD
by Donald G. Bloesch
(Christian Foundations IV) Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997, ISBN 1–085364-594–9 Hb
304pp indexes

Reviewed by David Parker

For the fourth volume in his comprehensive theological series, *Christian Foundations*, Donald G. Bloesch, Professor of Theology Emeritus of Dubuque Theological Seminary, turns to a study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. After a brief survey of some of the key issues in contemporary discussion, he clearly indicates the nature of his approach to this much disputed area of theology by declaring that we 'cannot fully appreciate the significance of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as his incarnation apart from a keen perception of the plight of humanity corrupted by sin'. In his typical style, he first surveys a range of views on the subject (both Christian and otherwise) and then gives a clear although not extended statement of the biblical position; he takes care to include personal, corporate and social aspects of sin.

This initial chapter opens the way for a discussion of the incarnation, with summaries of early and later Christological perspectives and heresies; the author includes a helpful investigation of the different emphases found amongst Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed churches. In re-affirming orthodox Chalcedonian Christology, Bloesch warns that 'the heresies of the church all have their source in the often well-meaning attempt to rationalize or resolve the christological paradox' thus giving rise to either docetic or ebionitic views, both of which are unsatisfactory. He seeks to overcome this problem by beginning neither with 'an abstract concept of God or Christ removed from history nor with the historical man Jesus' but with the 'paradox of God himself entering world history at a particular place and time, in a particular historical figure —Jesus of Nazareth' or in other words, 'the unique, incomparable' and personal, ontological union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ.

Bloesch devotes a lengthy chapter to the Virgin Birth. He discusses the doctrine from various angles showing its historical and theological foundations, removing obstacles to its belief and warning against holding it for invalid reasons (including the idea that it proves the deity of Christ or that it was the only possible mechanism for the incarnation). Thus, not wanting to claim too much for this doctrine or too little, he affirms that it is 'an ineradicable sign that God's great gift to humanity is entirely by grace'. Although he holds that it is not a belief that is necessary for salvation, he believes it is 'necessary to maintain the integrity and consistency of the witness of the church' and it 'serves to safeguard the faith against any heresy that separates or obscures the two natures of Christ'. Even if it is not a core belief like the gospel itself, the kernel of the faith, it is 'a sign that serves to communicate the mystery'. The chapter concludes with a full appendix on the 'role of Mary', in which the author seeks to 'reclaim Mary for the wider church', against the development of mariological doctrines; he asserts that from an evangelical perspective Mary is to be understood Christologically and given honour as 'the handmaid of the Lord and therefore as a model of holiness' according to the biblical witness.

Bloesch's Christological discussion does not include traditional sections proving the deity and humanity of Christ, but it does contain a short chapter on the pre-existence of

Christ, which the author acknowledges in his introduction as a point of some significance for him. After outlining various alternatives from the history of theology, he takes a minority option which affirms belief in the 'preexistent humanity of Jesus Christ'. In adopting this position, he again follows Karl Barth, to whom he is indebted for many insights (although not uncritically). Bloesch does not believe that the 'man Jesus preexisted in heaven as a separate being' but, basing his views on a profound theology and in coordination with his fundamental incarnational approach to Christology, he thinks in terms of 'individuality, embodiment, vulnerability and dependency'. These are all are implied in 'true deity' and have important consequences for and give strength to the notion of incarnation understood in the orthodox sense of the assumption of human flesh by the second person of the Trinity.

The second half of the book is devoted to chapters on the atonement, salvation, and the law and gospel. For Bloesch the 'incarnation sets the stage for the atonement, though the work of redemption already begins in the decision of Christ to incarnate himself in human flesh'. While Bloesch covers familiar material in these chapters, his own distinctive perspective linking both objective (atonement) and subjective (faith) aspects is clear; it is therefore possible for him to integrate thoroughly theology with spirituality, discipleship and ethics, and also to appreciate elements of otherwise rival theories of the atonement, salvation and sanctification. He is thus able to show a more catholic spirit than many other evangelical theologians, advocating the need to 'draw upon the insights of the fathers of the early church as well as the doctors of the medieval church', and at the same time to 'give serious attention to the enduring witness of the Protestant Reformation'. Yet he is fully aware of the necessity of restating 'the ancient faith in the language of the present day and [to] relate that faith to the pivotal issues in modern philosophy and culture', thus warning conservatives against the danger of simply returning naively to older positions.

Bloesch illustrates this approach to dealing with traditional doctrines in a new context with his treatment in the closing chapters on the lordship and the finality of Christ. He speaks of a 'progressive lordship whereby the victory of Christ is carried forward into history through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit' which allows for both the final victory of Christ and a 'christocracy' of word and prayer. Strongly counteracting 'power theology', he points out that 'As Christians we cannot bring in the kingdom but we can witness to it … We can announce the coming of the kingdom and call people to be ready for Christ's kingdom. We cannot build the kingdom, but we can serve the kingdom with the aid of the Spirit.' This is a perspective which places a heavy emphasis upon the church's mission and its engagement in the world, but avoids the pitfalls of considering these topics exclusively in terms of doctrine, ecclesiology or the history of religions.

Throughout this lucidly written volume, the author touches on a wide range of issues, both contemporary and historical, effectively showing their key elements and responding in terms of his own distinctive theological insights and methods. Although the book does not provide as much detail as some readers might expect, it is a valuable statement of a senior evangelical theologian's understanding of some of the most important and controverted aspects of Christian truth today.

LOSING OUR VIRTUE: WHY THE CHURCH MUST RECOVER ITS MORAL VISION

by David F. Wells
Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998, ISBN 0–8028-3827–8 Hb 228pp indexes, bibliog.

Reviewed by David Parker

Losing our Virtue is the third in a series by David Wells of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, analysing the state of the evangelical church in the United States. Despite the apparently non-theological approach of these books, he presents them as a necessary part of the theological task which involves asking 'what it means to have this Word in this world at this time'. He believes 'The only way to answer that question is to engage in careful, rigorous, and sustained analysis of the culture'. His trilogy therefore follows the classic sequence: *No Place for Truth* (1993) was prolegomena, followed by *God in the Wasteland* (1994) on the doctrine of God. Next could follow Christology or, in this case, anthropology, a study of the contemporary person. In reality, this book can be regarded as an extended exposition of the doctrine of the 'image of God' (*imago Dei*), taking the form of an examination of postmodern culture and its serious impact on the church, with a particular focus on 'our understanding of ourselves as moral beings'.

His 'beguilingly simple' central thesis is that as a result of the pressures of contemporary culture, people have 'lost their capacity to think of themselves as *moral* beings. In losing their bearings in any reality beyond what is experienced in the self, they lose their understanding about who they are.' He is emphatic that 'functionally, we are not morally disengaged, adrift, and alienated' but instead 'we are morally obliterated. We are, in practice, not only moral *illiterati*; we have become morally vacant.' His urgent question is whether 'the Church [can] recover its moral character enough to make a difference in a society whose fabric is now much frayed'.

In this book Wells revisits some topics and themes covered in earlier volumes, and paints a gloomy picture of the 'disintegrating moral culture' and the inability of the evangelical church to cope. Yet he also claims that his analysis points to a great opportunity for gospel witness. In fact, for Wells, understanding the most characteristic feature of postmodern culture (which is also its most spectacular weakness) is the key to recovering effective Christian witness at this vital turning point in history.

Wells presents a complex argument, which is sometimes difficult to follow, drawing upon studies and illustrations from a wide range of disciplines. The essence of his case is the view that in the present environment the self has been radically reconceived in a non-moral fashion. He argues that 'Self and society cannot be understood apart from each other'. Referring to historian Wilfred McClay, he points out that 'a society like ours—consumer driven, suffused with change, large and anonymous in its workings—produces a sense of self that is alien. It calls for a self that can adjust and transform its public presentation as circumstances requires. And it excites the thought that even the self could be different from what it has been. The self can be liberated.'

The main force behind this process is secularization, which has 'decimated any moral consensus that once was present. Today, not only is the public square stripped of divine meaning but so, too, is human consciousness. Amidst all of the abundance and the technological marvels of our time, what is true and what is right have lost their hold upon our society. They have lost their saliency, their capacity to shape life. Today, our moral center is gone. It is not merely that secularization has marginalized God, relegating him to the outer edges of our public life from whence he becomes entirely irrelevant, but … in our *private* universe . . . there is no center.'

This is a complex process which involves several highly significant developments. For example, there has been a change of emphasis from character to personality, which means a loss of the moral and a change from virtue to values. One consequence of this is that the middle ground between law and freedom, once filled by moral character, is now vacated and is open to contest, which is seen in increased attempts to control society by resort to litigation which is set over against increasing calls for personal freedom.

Similarly, there has been change from an emphasis on human nature to self consciousness and the prominence of relativism. This has been accompanied by the rise of a liberating psychology which focuses on self-realization, and on consumerism which is fed by advertising and also appeals to emotional needs, thus providing another way of self-realization. Thus psychotherapists and advertisers both offer a form of secular salvation which side-steps traditional moral norms. According to Wells, 'whether by a product or by a technique, whether through purchase or analysis, what is being offered is an answer to the diffusion of our identity and to the ache of our self. Side by side, they tap into our belief that the end of life is self-realization.'

Of particular importance to Wells is the change that this process brings when guilt (in its subjective sense as 'an emotional response to our violation of a moral norm') is secularized by being transformed into shame— 'falling short of what we think we should be, [or] what others expect of us'. Thus our relationship with God is set on one side in favour of social and personal acceptance, as determined by trends, fashions, celebrities and advertisers. So Wells concludes, 'as external moral norms have collapsed, being unacceptable has come to mean being unacceptable only to *ourselves*'.

But from a biblical perspective, Wells sees an enigma in this process: postmodern culture seeks to deny the moral, but cannot do so because people by virtue of their creation in the divine image remain moral beings. Furthermore, this contradiction means that postmodernism as a system is inherently unstable, and has planted the seeds of its own destruction—it is 'so heavy with its own cynicism as to be unsustainable for very long' and the 'moral fabric [of the culture] is rotting' and its 'spirit is troubled'.

Therefore, drawing attention to the fact that, in contrast with the situation in earlier times, the Christian faith is now without any serious secular competitor, Wells urges Christians to see that the 'Church's best entrée into the postmodern world, then, is found in the indelible moral contradictions that penetrate all of life'. In a culture that 'has given up on serious thought, rational argument and historical defences', the frustration that arises out of 'our moral failures' should be exploited for apologetic and evangelistic purposes.

But Wells laments that just as this vital opportunity arises, the church is 'losing its voice'. He is pessimistic about its ability to recover its 'moral vision' because he believes it too has been overwhelmed by a postmodern spirituality which has psychologized sin and salvation, changed its focus from divine truth to power religion and adopted a new way of doing church in a consumerist seeker-sensitive manner.

Losing our Virtue is a valuable and insightful critique of contemporary culture, but, as the author recognizes, it is strong and often unpalatable medicine for the evangelical church. However, like its predecessors, it sees little of value in contemporary developments in mission, church and ministry which seek to find points of contact and entry into postmodern culture, instead regarding them as capitulation to the spirit of the age. Furthermore, it offers little by way of positive suggestions in the practical realm, even though the main answer to the question posed by the subtitle seems to be that the church needs to recover its moral vision for the sake of evangelism and so impact on the world.

But at a more basic level still, it is one thing to make a meaningful analysis of today's culture and to point out the great apologetic opportunities presented by it, but even the most insightful exposition needs to present some pointers on how the church can develop the spiritual dynamic which will enable it to recover its moral vision.

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD? THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF BRITISH EVANGELICALISM
by David W. Smith

Reviewed by David Parker

In this book, David W. Smith, Principal of Northumbria Bible College, opens up a new perspective on Evangelicalism in the United Kingdom by examining its social impact from the 17th century to the present. As the title indicates, he focuses on Evangelicalism as a movement whose central concerns for personal conversion and fellowship with God were not directed inward without any social consequences; on the contrary, it was a faith which was a 'powerful agent for a political and social change' and capable of transforming the world. The prime question in his mind is 'whether Evangelicals in Europe and North America can recover the world-transformative vision of the founders of this tradition and so play their part in the development of a truly critical and missionary engagement with western culture'.

He believes the 'jury is still out' on this question, but it appears to him that 'the soft options of a fearful retreat to an irrelevant fundamentalism, or an easy triumphalism which mistakes technologically-induced numerical growth for genuine discipleship continue to prove attractive and result in churches which, even if outwardly prosperous, remain enmeshed in the culture of late modernity'.

Smith commences his analysis with the origins of Evangelicalism when it emerged as a world transformative religion, a characteristic which he traces to its Calvinist and Puritan theology, supported by a-millennial views. Even Wesley and his followers were influenced by this vision, despite many other differences.

Then follow two chapters on the 19th century, tracing the fragmentation and then the defensive reaction adopted by Evangelicalism in the face of developing 'modernity'. He agrees that during this time there 'were significant voices recalling the original vision and insisting that Evangelicals were called to a mission that involved counter-cultural subversion in the context of the modern world'. Yet he paints a bleak picture of a faith that lost its social impact and became increasingly privatized, noting that this trend has been extensively discussed by Weber, Durkheim and other sociologists of religion.

Smith then turns to the recent resurgence of Evangelicalism, unexpected by some, to enquire whether it 'provides a basis from which [Evangelicalism] can contribute creatively to the task of Christian mission in the third millennium'. This, he explains, is made more urgent than ever by the 'crisis *within* the culture of the West'. He points out that, as Weber had predicted, modernity has created a culture 'without a transcendent source of meaning and values'.

Smith argues that this situation presents 'a unique opportunity for renewal in mission', and as such is of vital importance to a world-transformative movement like Evangelicalism. But he doubts whether, in its present state, it is capable of rising to the occasion. He cites, for example, the emphasis on numerical growth, and urges that attention must be paid to the 'quality and character' rather than numbers. He also warns about the danger of compromising alignments with the ruling elements of culture such as political, social and economic forces which result, as David Bosch has stated, in being 'compromised to privilege in one form or another'. Smith concludes, 'Evangelicalism has itself tasted the beguiling pleasures of power and privilege and is unlikely to fulfil its potential in the post-modern era without a frank and humble recognition of its own compromises and illicit alliances.'

So he calls for the 'radical conversion' of a movement whose basic principles have been 'domesticated and privatized, leaving it unable to recognize the extent to which it has become ensnared in the worship of idols which dominate western culture'. He fears that

unless this 'radical conversion' occurs, evangelicals will fail in their mission and deny their two century old heritage.

Because this is only a short book, Smith's treatment is necessarily selective, but he has made an effective choice of figures and movements to illustrate his theme, including some which are well known, as well as many which are less familiar. While details of his interpretation could be debated, some thought provoking insights are presented in this passionate, well argued case for the re-conversion of the evangelical movement. But there is a disappointing absence of pointers which could lead to a positive outcome.

The author identifies six different traditions within Evangelicalism and calls for greater cooperation between them as one possible sign of hope, but doubts whether Fundamentalism would be capable of joining in. The only other possibility he mentions is the conviction of some that 'historical Calvinism represented "a fundamental alteration in Christian sensibility" in which flight from the problems of the social world to a privatized religion of personal devotion was replaced by "the vision and practice of working to reform the social world in obedience to God" '. But while he is hopeful that a renewed study of Calvinism may 'yet have much to contribute to the future of Evangelicalism', he concedes that in the past there have been times when 'the world-transformative nature of Calvinism went largely unrecognised and neglected'.

Book and Journal Information

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