

**BOOK REVIEWS**

*The Whole Gospel for the Whole World:  
Story of Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelization, Manila 1989*  
editor, Alan Nichols  
Charlotte NC/Ventura CA: Lausanne Committee  
for World Evangelization/Regal Books, 1989  
144 pages; \$7.95

In a short 144 pages, this book captures the major highlights of the Lausanne II Congress, held in Manila in July 1989. The book is an excellent record, a "tell it as it happened" synopsis, of this historic event, which it places quite unapologetically in line with earlier, better-known church councils that have focused worldwide mission strategy. True to what has come to be known as the Lausanne spirit, the book concentrates on issues which define the mission of the church today. Under the themes "The Whole Church", "The Whole Gospel" and "The Whole World", an attempt has been made to synthesize for the reader the proceedings both in plenary sessions and in the workshops.

Lausanne II was a meeting of evangelicals from many parts of the world. Its avowed concern was to revisit, reevaluate and rekindle a concern for the 12,000 unreached people groups, or the 2.7 billion people that have yet to be evangelized. In the process of study, fellowship, debate and interchange, the meeting served as a stimulus for the church to proclaim Christ until He comes. One anticipates that, as with the Lausanne I, there will result some identifiable evangelistic initiatives generated directly from the Lausanne II Congress.

In this brief review I will concentrate on issues raised at Lausanne II, and referred to in this book, which are of special significance for Africa. Let me begin with the issue of evangelism and social responsibility. Adequate attention needed to be given to how evangelicals might better harmonize what is being said with what is being done in this area. There is an African saying that you can tell whether a chick will grow to be a hen or a cock by the way it stands. Because of widespread poverty and decreasing per capita incomes in many African countries, social concern will have to gain more prominence as an integral aspect of evangelism.

Also a theology and application of biblical justice can no longer be sidelined in Africa. The realities of Africa, with wars, famines, violation of human rights, dictatorships, coups and counter-coups, call for contextualization of the gospel as God's liberating force. The proclamation must be reinforced by the

incarnational aspect of the gospel. Throughout the proceedings of Lausanne II there was a very sobering emphasis on the credibility of the messenger. As the *Manila Manifesto* aptly puts it:

We are charged to behave in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel of Christ, for the watching world rightly seeks evidence to substantiate the claims which Christ's disciples make for him. A strong evidence is our integrity" (page 118).

It is of particular significance that Lausanne II laid much weight on the mandate of the laity. There is a growing awareness in many churches of the need to be free from the traditional bureaucratic domination that binds the laity, hand and foot, limiting that massive human and intellectual energy that could otherwise be mobilized for evangelism.

Lausanne II had a strong message for the African male-dominated church to appreciate the gifts with which God has endowed women. The proverbial theological conservatism of evangelicals will certainly be a blockage to any movement towards a positive view on the role of women in the church. This conservatism has led to ambiguity and contention in response to women's claims to equal leadership in the church. It is a well-established fact that whereas women are in the majority in many congregations, leadership is largely in the hands of men. The sheer number of women puts a large question mark over against the validity of this state of affairs.

Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo gave a comprehensive definition of the Gospel in his address to the Congress, which challenged the superficial individualistic popular understanding of the term. In his address he rejected syncretism, as among those practices that tend to place Christ not as Lord, but as "a lord", in a gallery among many others. His definition gave room, too, for social concern and socio-political involvement as necessary expressions of authentic evangelicalism. Africa is bedeviled by numerous socio-political woes and immense human suffering to which the Gospel has to respond. The whole gospel for Africa will therefore be redemptive of the whole person, body, mind and soul.

Several speakers addressed themselves to the impact on evangelism of other religions and of modernization. These are of great importance to Africa, where Islam has assumed tremendous militancy. Modernization and secularism too have taken their toll on the ranks of believers. Another growing problem, though by no means unique to Africa, is nominalism. The Congress also opened the eyes of participants to the looming crisis in many Third World cities. This is the problem of rural-urban migration, and the evolution of slum and squatter settlements. In Nairobi, for example, close to 75% of the residents live in slums.

Out of the Congress came the *Manila Manifesto*. The book contains the complete text of the Manifesto. Certainly this will become an essential document for churches to study, and where necessary take action. The two themes

of the Manifesto are totally applicable to the task of evangelism in Africa, namely: "Proclaim Christ until He comes" and "Calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world."

The question that remains unanswered is just how the spirit of Lausanne II will continue. Of course, it remains fervent in the hearts of the 4000 participants, as well as in the national voluntary committees that gather from time to time to consider their efforts for the evangelization of the unreached in each country. As article 14 of the earlier *Lausanne Covenant* renders it, world-wide evangelization will become a realistic possibility only when the Spirit renews the church in truth and wisdom, faith, holiness, love and power.

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*Summary of the Nairobi Church Survey*  
Stan Downes, Robert Oehrig, and John Shane  
(Nairobi: Daystar University College, 1989)  
100 pages; Ksh 40/

There is an Ashanti proverb in which the tortoise says, "Haste is a good thing and deliberation is also a good thing." Before us now in the little book we review, is an affirmation of the wisdom especially of the latter half of that proverb. Patient perseverance always rewards with rich dividends. And when those dividends promise enrichment for the life and evangelism of the church, we can be even more grateful.

For this book we can be especially grateful. As its title indicates, it is a summary written in easy English, not for the experts and theoreticians, but for church planters and gospel dreamers of Africa, who want to see God's church grow in the great cities increasingly dotting the African landscape. The focus of the book is on the city of Nairobi, and it should be in the home of every Nairobi Christian. But its approach, and the methodology by which it proceeds, in fact contain valuable lessons for churches around the world.

The book comes to us after years of painstaking and costly research under the auspices of Daystar University College. Behind it lies a comprehensive study project and report (available at the College) entitled, *Nairobi: Christian Outreach in a World-Class City*, which was coordinated by Larry Niemeyer, with editorial assistance from Robert Oehrig and Elizabeth Bassett. We can

only guess at the character of that study. The summary contains no description of the more elaborate study, and offers us only a few general suggestions as to how it was carried on. For the average Nairobi church leader, this probably is not necessary. For those of us outside of Nairobi and interested in doing surveys similar to this one, a few pages describing the history of the project, the methodology and the questions asked would have been valuable. Are there plans to put such materials into separate print? It could be most useful.

The summary divides itself easily into three parts – the context of the city, the briefest section in the book; an overview of the demographics of the church in Nairobi (approximately half of the book); and recommendations for implementing the data gathered in the study (14 pages). Simple graphs are abundant and key information is frequently repeated in boxes throughout the pages. It is as “user-friendly” a piece of research of this type as I have ever seen. An index might have made it even more so.

No one can leave this book without being challenged. What of the discrepancy between the 75-80% of Nairobi’s residents who claim to be Christians and the 8% who attend church each week? Why is it that this figure has remained constant over the past twenty years in the face of Nairobi’s rapid urbanization? Why should the 30% segment of Nairobi’s citizens who are unemployed and with the lowest income be significantly under-represented in the church? What is being done to reach the city’s unreached peoples: the Muslims who make up 10% of the city’s population, the 5-10% who are followers of Africa’s traditional religions, the social sub- cultures, and the international community of nearly 100,000 expatriates in the city? Why is it that ethnic people groups which are unreached in the rural areas continue to remain outside of the influence of the churches in Nairobi?

These selected questions, and many others like them, are not left unanswered. The final section of the book especially offers recommendations that speak in a general way to these issues. And implicit in those suggestions is some exciting pioneer work waiting to be done, as pastors and church leaders experiment with some new models on the streets and in the districts of Nairobi.

May I express the hope that in future editions there will be some significant expansion of the first part of the summary, the section on the city. As it is, it is almost anecdotal to the whole work. And yet, there are important clues for church growth in the study of urban sociology and demographics that need more attention.

Some suggestions, for example, on how migration takes place into the city might more effectively link church planting efforts in both Nairobi and the rural areas. Some discussion of social classes, and how they are defined in Kenyan culture, would open the church to searching with more sophistication for “unreached people groups” among more than ethnic communities. The impact of the city on family and kin relationships, the relative rise in sig-

nificance of "secondary social relationships" in the city (vocations, friends, etc.) are all urban clues for the church planter. One of the helpful challenges given in the last section of the book is a call for a "new understanding of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility" (pp79-80). Outlining in a practical way in the first part of the book how the social and political systems of the city work might underline that challenge and provide some concrete ideas for implementation.

Perhaps expanding this part of the book might also open another dimension to the growth of the church which I hope future editions of this fine work will give more attention to, namely the relation of the churches to the urban communities in which they are located, and the contribution the individual Christian is called to make as "salt and light" in the city's systems.

The nominalism that is a great concern of this survey will not be solved simply by more new congregations and better church attendance. That is surely crucial. But another important part of the answer will come when the church and its members see themselves as "a city on a hill" (Matt. 5:14) and behave as lights should in a city.

Over 600 Nairobi congregations were visited and nearly 400 church leaders interviewed to gather this data. Could the last section of the book offering recommendations have included some quotations and case studies to make the summary more concrete? Or can we encourage a follow-up volume that will reinforce this one?

The churches of Nairobi (and the rest of us as well) have now in their hands a valuable asset and a powerful challenge. May it stir us all to more than merely exciting reading.

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*Nairobi Baptist Church: Through 30 Years of Worship*  
 by Emi M Gichinga  
 (Nairobi: [Nairobi Baptist Church, 1989])  
 ix, 128 pages; Ksh 40/

For those interested in the growth and ministry of local congregations in Africa, this recent publication on Nairobi Baptist Church will offer stimulating

reading. Nairobi Baptist Church is in several ways a unusual church. It has pioneered in many areas of church ministry in one of Africa's leading urban centres. It has had a distinguished line of pastors, two of whom (Gottfried Osei-Mensah and Tom Houston) have gone on to become international directors of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. Almost every Sunday the crowds of attenders overflow the church's three morning services. This church provides a challenging example for local churches elsewhere on the continent.

The book's ten chapters cover the history of the church from its founding in 1958, the church's membership, its governance, pastors, and ministries, including its spiritual and social outreach. The author, Emi Gichinga, is a member of Nairobi Baptist Church and the wife of one of its pastors. A graduate of the University of Nairobi, she also directs the Crisis Pregnancy Ministries of Kenya. Her book succinctly illustrates several basic qualities which have characterized Nairobi Baptist Church through the years and which commend it for wider attention.

1. The founding members of the church determined from the very start that the church was to be self-supporting. Over the whole period of thirty years, the church has been entirely responsible for its pastors' salaries. Three of the pastors have been British, one was Ghanaian, one Ugandan, and two Kenyan. The church has supported all of them throughout without any subsidy. Likewise the membership has paid for all physical facilities without assistance from overseas. The church's support of local outreach ministries has also been exemplary. It has always tithed its income to support other organizations and ministries outside its own activities; currently over 30% of its income is devoted to such ministries.
2. From the very beginning the church decided to be an international, multi-racial community. This was particularly challenging thirty years ago, when Kenya was a segregated colonial society. Of the twenty founding members, 2 were African, 5 were Asian, and 13 were European. Opposition to this multi-racial policy existed within the church, but the commitment of the leadership made the difference. Today the congregation has become predominantly African (more than 70%), but because Nairobi itself is very much an international community, the membership remains a rich mixture of many cultures and nationalities.
3. Nairobi Baptist Church decided at its beginning to become an open-membership church. The only criteria for membership was a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. While the church practices believers baptism by immersion, this was not made a condition of membership. This decision meant that the congregation could not be affiliated to the East African Baptist Union. The church chose to go it alone in order to serve all Christians. This commitment has been carried out to the limit. The present two pastors have Anglican

and Presbyterian beginnings, and the congregation is quite diverse within an evangelical frame of reference.

4. The church from the start also committed itself to the expository preaching of God's Word. It has always endeavoured to recruit pastors who had that gift, and through the years it has become widely known for the quality of biblical exposition from its pulpit. Undoubtedly this is a principal reason for the nearly 2000 who regularly attend Sunday morning services.

5. The founding members of Nairobi Baptist Church committed themselves to innovation as the Holy Spirit guided them. For example, the church pioneered outreach to the youth of Nairobi, establishing a very popular Sunday youth service, which is led by the church youth themselves, with the kind of music they prefer. These services continue to be crowded out. The church also pioneered in the use of guitars in church services in Nairobi. And Kenya Youth for Christ was started through the efforts of Nairobi Baptist Church.

*Nairobi Baptist Church: Through 30 Years of Worship* is a book informed Christians everywhere should read. It illustrates the urgent need to start new churches on right foundations. Such principles have not been easy to sustain, but owing to commitment by the leadership much good has come despite many difficult situations. I recommend this book for the attention of church leaders and theological colleges throughout Africa. [The book is available through Keswick Bookshop, PO Box 10242, Nairobi, Kenya.]

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*The Ethics of the New Testament*  
by Wolfgang Schrage  
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988)  
369 pages; \$29.95

If you are an evangelical and a student of the Christian faith, your primary authority, and your starting point for theology and for sermons and, indeed, for your whole life, is Scripture. This means that you should first read good introductions to the Old and New Testaments and then good theologies of the same. Then what? Turn to historical, systematic and applied theology? Not yet. You missed a genre of literature all too frequently ignored in biblical studies, namely biblical ethics.

Wolfgang Schrage, professor of New Testament at the University of Bonn in Germany, may easily be considered the dean of biblical ethics. He has published a considerable number of books and articles in the field for about thirty years, and recently some of this literature has been translated from German into English. This most recent book to be translated is what might be considered his crowning work. First published in German in 1982, it is easily one of the best of its kind, and for that reason needs to be a frequently consulted reference tool in our theological libraries. It is also a good resource for ideas for ethically-focused sermons. Acquaintance with the jargon, categories, and concerns of New Testament studies is assumed, but knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is not necessary for the reader.

*The Ethics of the New Testament* is divided into nine chapters: "Jesus' Eschatological Ethics;" "Ethical Beginnings in the Earliest Congregations;" "Ethical Accents in the Synoptic Gospels;" "The Christological Ethics of Paul;" "The Ethics of Responsibility in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles;" "Parenesis in the Epistle of James;" "The Commandment of Brotherly Love in the Johannine Writings;" "Exhortations Addressed to the Pilgrim People in the Epistle to the Hebrews;" and "Eschatological Exhortation in the Book of Revelation." Each chapter begins with a select biography (understandably weighted toward German literature), while the book concludes with a topical bibliography (4 pages). Also included are an introduction on the nature of New Testament ethics and a Scripture/primary source index.

What you do not get is much material on 2 Thessalonians, 2 Peter, or Jude. You do not get a history of interpretation of New Testament ethics, nor an analysis of the New Testament's ethical vocabulary. You do not get very much interaction with Christian moral thought through the centuries. You do not get hermeneutical reflection on how the Biblical material may be used today. And you do not get a summary or concluding chapter.

There are two reasons for this last omission: Schrage's introduction covers some of this ground, and also he asserts that there is no such thing as a New Testament ethic. Thus each author's voice must be heard separately (p. 3). Granted, but there are three reasons why Schrage should have included such a conclusion: (i) because he views each author through a consistently applied frame; (ii) because he sees interesting similarities and differences in the various NT authors, which are noted throughout the book but not gathered together in conclusion; and (iii) because a legitimate historical-critical concern to appreciate distinctions between authors should not overshadow canonical concerns, if one is to do New Testament ethics properly. That is, the discipline by its very nature invites reflection on the unity and diversity of the canon.

Schrage's methodological framework for analyzing New Testament ethics consists of the following categories: the theological foundation for ethics; the



nature and structure of the Christian life; substance and material criteria for ethics; concrete ethics. Any methodology has its limitations, but Schrage's is able to examine the various dimensions of the New Testament texts through this framework. Even so, I prefer a frame which not only includes the theological foundation, source, context, and substance of ethics (as Schrage's does), but which more systematically distinguishes guidance, motivation, and empowering in the moral life. These topics are not by any means ignored by Schrage; they are just not systematically investigated.

Certain presuppositions and conclusions in this book will be discomfiting for most evangelical readers. Some may feel a bit uncomfortable with Schrage's concern in the Gospels to distinguish which material goes back to Jesus and which is a product of the early church or the Gospel redactor (chapter two tends to the concerns of form and tradition criticisms and chapter three to redactional interests). One should remember, however, that these are legitimate exegetical questions, even if presuppositionally one is concerned with the text as it stands and not some probable reconstruction of stages preceding it. And most evangelicals will chafe under Schrage's determination that some letters from the Pauline corpus not only were not written by Paul but also in fact have an ethic at odds with Paul's. Schrage argues that ethics in the Pastorals are "much more prosaic, pedestrian, bourgeois, moralistic" than Paul's (p. 257). However, since such accusations are defended at length, Schrage's work provides an excellent bit of iron on which others may sharpen their tools for exegesis and ethical inquiry.

If the whole of Schrage's book were a negative polemic against the ethics of the New Testament (as is Jack Sanders, *Ethics of the New Testament*), I would be less enthusiastic about recommending it to the readers of this journal. In fact, the analyses offered by Schrage are generally favorable to the text's viewpoints and are often insightful, even profound. I found his analyses of the ethics of Jesus, Paul, 1 Peter, the Gospel of John, and Revelation (the bulk of the book) most interesting and generally convincing.

Some of the arguments might be noted here. With respect to the theological foundation for ethics, Schrage emphasizes the role of christology: the ethics of the NT share as their "criterion and basis . . . God's saving act in Jesus Christ" (p. 8). In Jesus' ethics this is more implicit, since ethics is grounded in the teaching that the Kingdom of God is already here and also impending, but Jesus is the One Who brings the Kingdom. This theological ground for ethics in the New Testament means that the indicative of God's salvation is the foundation for the imperative (ethical exhortation), that God's love and grace are the foundation, guidance, motivation, and empowering for ethics (my terms).

For Paul, ethics are grounded on Pauline christological, sacramental, pneumatologic-charismatic, and eschatological bases. According to Schrage,

the christological basis for ethics changes outside of Paul. In Ephesians and Colossians the emphasis is more on the risen exalted Lord than on the cross; in the Pastorals it is more on the incarnation. The sacramental basis for ethics—a changed person through baptism and the giving of the Spirit—is barely noted in the Pastorals. Instead, one finds that the pneumatologic-charismatic basis for ethics has been commandeered in service of ecclesiastical office and preservation of doctrine. The eschatological basis also changes outside Paul. While the fading of imminent eschatological hopes in the early church was not the reason for the beginning of ethical concerns, as some have argued (e.g., Dibelius), the fading of these hopes did nevertheless affect Christian theology and ethics. The eschatological basis for ethics, so crucial in Paul's undisputed letters, is fading in the Pastorals and in Luke, and John's Gospel has a radical realized eschatology.

With respect to the nature and structure of the Christian life, the NT writers and Jesus agree that the whole of life is claimed by God, and that works, not just right intent, are expected of the one who has received God's promise of salvation. Schrage does think, however, that James (ch. 2) flatly disagrees with Paul on this issue, when James argues that works are necessary for salvation. Two of Schrage's major points throughout the book place him over against existentialist and situational ethics (e.g., R. Bultmann). NT ethics are, to be sure, *situational and subjective* (e.g., relying on the changed nature and on the Spirit's guidance and empowering), but they are also, at times, *authoritative and external* (cf. especially pp. 187-195). Moreover, NT writers and Jesus repeatedly translate the love command (or other general ethical principles) into *concrete* activities.

With respect to the substance (content) and material criteria (sources and context) of ethics, Schrage traces the views of the various authors on, e.g., the use of the Old Testament, Jesus' words and conduct, the Jewish and Graeco-Roman context, etc. for ethics. Jesus himself, as well as the NT authors, accepted the OT as an authoritative source only selectively and critically. For example, Schrage writes that the "OT must first become the 'law of Christ' and be interpreted with respect to its true intention (Gal. 6.2); only then can it be the measure of Christian life" (p. 206; on Jesus, cf. pp. 55-68). James may affirm the authority of the entire OT, but he "silently discards" the cultic and ceremonial laws (p. 287). The words of Jesus become law for James, and they are authoritative for Paul too. But these and other criteria take second place to the command to love as a hermeneutical key to using the OT for ethics and as a heuristic key for the Christian life. This command is also subject to different applications by the NT writers, according to Schrage, but it is one of the major unifying factors for ethics in the NT.

These are the sort of issues and comments one finds in this book (along with their proof, of course). I have selected only some of the conclusions drawn throughout the book in order to show the type of discussion that the reader

will find. (And it is just this sort of assembling of conclusions that could have formed part of the missing conclusion chapter!)

I am reticent to offer criticism of one from whom I have learned so much, and to do so in so short a space. Yet my own thinking on New Testament ethics leads me to offer a few suggestions. I was especially displeased with Schrage's handling of the Pastoral epistles. The claim that soteriology is now primarily incarnational and not cross-focused seems, on the one hand, to make a distinction which does not always apply (e.g., Phil. 2.6ff; 1 Tim. 3.16; 2 Tim. 1.10) and, on the other, to be false for the Pastorals—Christ is the one who died for us, is the reigning Lord, and will come again as Judge (cf. 1 Tim. 2.5f; 6.13; 2 Tim. 2.8-13; 4.1; Tit. 2.13f; 3.4-7). With respect to the substance and material criteria of ethics in the Pastorals, Schrage says that there is no reference to conformity to Christ (p. 259). But in 1 Tim. 6.13 Paul gives the one and only clear reference in the epistles to being conformed to the pattern of the life of Jesus. Furthermore, no adequate accounting of the Pastoral's ethics is possible without reference to suffering and mission, and fair appraisal of the theology and ethics of the Pastorals is impossible without tracing supposedly new doctrinal and ecclesiastical themes in the undisputed letters (e.g., concern for ecclesiastical and doctrinal authority).

Undoubtedly some will wish for a different emphasis in the book, such as more attention to the sociological factors contributing to early Christian ethics (cf., e.g., Ralph Martin's commentary on James, which argues that much of Jacobian parenthesis results from the divisions between wealthy and poor priests just prior to the outbreak of war with the Romans in the 60's). My own work in Pauline ethics has led me to appreciate reading Paul's ethics from the perspective of a character-informing and community-producing Gospel "Story" (so-called "narrative ethics"). Such a perspective is by no means at odds with a strictly Biblical theological approach but certainly opens up new windows through which old problems might be viewed. I am also inclined to argue that this Gospel Story has a "missionary" dimension, calling us to make it our story not only in personal ethics but also in adopting God's mission as a "foundation" for ethics (and so not only eschatology but also a christologically defined mission for the interim time defines Christian conduct). At a few points Schrage comes close to saying that the Gospel as "Story" and God's mission are important for ethics, such as when he describes the ethics of Hebrews as for a pilgrim people, or says that 1 Peter speaks less of Jesus as a model for life than as showing the path to be taken, and that the author also calls for a missionary apologetic for conduct (p. 273; cf. also pp. 51, 309, 318). I believe that both themes, "Gospel Story" and "Mission", deserve more prominence in a study of New Testament ethics.

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*Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists*  
 by Philip M Steyne  
 (Houston TX: Touch Publications, 1989)  
 272 pages

In *Gods of Power*, Philip Steyne of Columbia Biblical Seminary in South Carolina, USA, has given us his reflections on an area that urgently needs solid biblical consideration in today's church. Steyne's core idea is worth pondering: animism, or some form of it, is at the heart of every non-Christian religion. Furthermore, even Christianity as actually practiced by many today has at its core remnants of an animistic outlook. Leaving aside for the moment the questionable use of the term "animism" and the evident tendency to reductionism, this thesis carries powerful implications in several areas, most notably for thinking about contextualization and about the role of traditional religions in providing entry points for the gospel.

Steyne defines the religion of the animist as "a system of beliefs, feelings, and behavior which issue in rites, rituals, and liturgies, by which familiar spirit-beings are manipulated to provide success, happiness and security in all of life" (p. 29). He also adds:

Animism is simultaneously pantheistic, polytheistic and deistic. The animist lives in a "spiritual" world as over against the techno-scientific world of the westerner. His world is humanistic and socialistic rather than individualistic and/or democratic. He strives for a world of balance and harmony rather than one of competition, although he is not free from competitive motives. His ultimate concerns relate to the "who" and "why" of the exigencies of life, rather than the "what" and "how" (p. 36).

Several positive contributions of the book may be noted. First, the book is well organized and very readable. The overview of the basic philosophy and practices of animists constitutes a reasonable survey of a broad spectrum of cultures. Steyne's introductory survey and definitions are concise and clear, and enable the reader to read the rest of the book knowing what Steyne means by the terminology used. A second strength is that his writing covers a broad (indeed a global) sweep of belief systems, and shows how apparently disparate examples from various religions may be essentially tied into a simple unifying explanation. Steyne does not say that all religions follow the same creeds or practices—rather he maintains that they all appear to be built on a common root philosophy (or world view) which is animistic in nature. A third strength is his recognition of the persistency of the "animistic core" of any religious world view (see p. 188). It is certainly helpful in explaining phenomena often noted in Christian literature on this continent (e.g. that in times of crisis Christians tend to revert to more traditional ways for help, such as diviners.) This is linked with a fourth strength of the book, namely the recognition that many Christians have imported an animistic core into their Christian faith and practice (pp. 48-52). Though the basic idea of a syncretistic approach among

many Christians is not new, Steyne's presentation of how we do it is clear and powerful, reminding us of the need to acknowledge that we have not "fully arrived". A fifth strength is Steyne's proposition that Christianity is the ultimate "power" religion, which does not separate "spirit" from "nature", and that we need to realise this if we are to make inroads in seeing the Gospel touch the core of the animistic adherent (pp. 19-20; 240).

In addition to these strengths, we must acknowledge several weaknesses. The first is a direct consequence of trying to unify many systems under a single heading, namely the problem of reductionism. The professional anthropologist would never accept the book's central thesis. I find it difficult at best to agree that any single "core" is at the root of *every* religion in the world, unless that core is defined so loosely that it is stripped of all possible significance. Steyne never really addresses this issue in the book, though at least he does give a brief apology for his use of "animism" (p. 16), a term now discredited among anthropologists and sociologists.

Unfortunately, to this reductionism is linked a tendency towards overstatement to prove the case. For example, Steyne writes, "While spirit-possession is *deviant* in western society, it is considered a *norm* in animistic society" (p. 136; emphasis mine). Both ends of this assertion may be debated, and it would certainly not apply across the full spectrum of either society. A second example is when Steyne equates the naming of children after departed ancestors with "reincarnation" (pp. 61 and 63); this may be true in some cultures, but certainly not in all of them! A third example is his caricature of the animist: "Thinking out something is wearisome and to be avoided. It is an exercise in futility" (p. 178). If this is true of all animists, how does Steyne explain, for example, the myriad of Hindu writings which reflect very deep thinking about the nature of the world?

Closely linked to this are several statements that border on paternalism— "Though animistic man is *self-centered, self-conceited and self-conscious*, he tends to do nothing without the group" (p. 182, emphasis mine), and "Although there may be some exceptions, a commonality . . . is the *fact* that there is no fundamental basis for moral action" (p. 191, emphasis mine). At the very least Steyne is undiplomatic, and such statements will be read by non-Westerners as the continued self-proclamation of Western "supremacy".

The last weakness of the book that we will mention are the numerous typographical errors, especially in the endnotes for the chapters (*every* chapter has at least one mistake in the reference notes). The proliferation of these errors made it easy to focus on the mistakes and not pay enough attention to the content— with the net result that I found reading the book to be a frustrating exercise.

In spite of these weaknesses, some important issues are raised by Steyne's study that are relevant for our context. First is the global perspective of Steyne.

If we can avoid a reductionistic tendency, theologians wrestling with important issues relative to African traditional religions can greatly benefit from recognizing how problems similar to their own are being addressed elsewhere in the world. For example, there is a wealth of literature on ancestral understandings in Asian Christian perspective, but very few authors writing in the African context show any awareness of this literature. The discussion on both continents could surely benefit from greater global awareness that many of the problems faced in one location are being addressed in another.

A second issue which the book usefully raises is the reality of the syncretising tendencies inherent in all cultures where the Church has been planted. While the syncretistic “core” may not always actually be “animist” in nature, there can be little doubt that people of every culture will bring their “roots” in with them when they come to faith in Christ, and that these roots will in some fashion distort the Gospel message. The fact that this distortion is least visible to those of the “home” culture shows the need for cross-cultural interaction in developing contextual theological approaches. A multi-cultural approach to contextualising theology can minimize the blinders of a mono-cultural approach, and Steyne’s global emphasis serves as a reminder of this.

A third issue usefully raised is the animist core which Steyne suggests is found even in Christianity (see especially pp. 51-2). Many will acknowledge this to be true of other churches, or of other people’s practice of the faith, but we do not as readily see it in our own case. Though Steyne does not specifically mention it, such a core may be found not only in developing areas of the world, but is also present in the “advanced” West. It will do *all* of us well to consider in what respects the core of our belief system has been at least influenced, if not infected, by an animist outlook. Such an insight should cause each of us to look inward rather than merely outward. It is an insight as relevant for the Independent Churches as it is for the mainline denominations.

Steyne’s book has both significant strengths and significant weaknesses. My overall impression is that the book is worth having for school libraries or in an instructor’s personal library for reference. But I could not recommend it as a textbook in the African context, unless the instructor is willing to spend a significant amount of time in class dealing with the deficiencies of the book.

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*Justification By Faith: What It Means to Us Today*  
 by Alister McGrath  
 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988)  
 160 pages; \$11.95

The discussion of contextualization as a theory never seems to end. But where, asks the impatient Christian, are actual examples of what good contextualized evangelical theology looks like? Alister McGrath, lecturer in Christian Theology and Ethics at Oxford University, has been listening to missiologists like David Shank and Harvie Conn. He has become convinced that contextualization is vital for the communication of the gospel, and particularly the experience of justification, in contemporary culture. "While cultural matters are relativized by the gospel's absolute claims," writes McGrath, "these claims must still be communicated and articulated in and to those specific life situations and contexts" (p. 15). Flowing from this conviction has come a fine restatement of the doctrine of justification by faith for a popular audience.

But contextualization for the purpose of mere intellectual understanding is not enough for McGrath. He believes that we need to know the doctrine of justification by faith in a culturally relevant way in order to pass on the experience of justification to men and women in our churches and in coming generations:

We need not only an encounter with God, we also need, if this encounter and experience is to be passed down to our children, an intellectual framework within which the redeeming and liberating encounter with and experience of the living God takes place. The doctrine of justification establishes this framework. But it is the **experience, the encounter**, rather than this framework the preacher is primarily concerned with! It is possible to misunderstand the doctrine of justification by faith as simply an obscure verbal formula – when it is in fact concerned with transmitting and preserving the experience of an encounter with none other than the living God (p. 14).

Hence the contemporary preacher, whether in Nairobi or New York, Lesotho or London, must engage in contextualization not just to pass on the idea of justification but in order to pass on "the possibility of encountering God" (p. 14). God will not be found outside the truth of the gospel. And the truth of the gospel is not understood outside of reverent contextualization.

What this commitment to evangelical contextualizing actually means for McGrath can be summarized as follows: Justification by faith can be renewed as both proclamation and experience if we rediscover the biblical and historic teaching of this doctrine and translate this teaching into the existential, personal and ethical categories of modern man in an evangelical way. This is what McGrath seeks to do. How well does he do it?

His chapter on the biblical teaching on justification is brief but perceptive. Central to the biblical concept of justification is the Old Testament perspective of being in a covenant relationship with God. McGrath quite rightly emphasizes the importance of Genesis 15:6 for both the Old Testament and New Testament concept of justification. He argues persuasively that the central idea of justification in Abraham's experience and subsequently in the life of the believer is not "to be declared morally upright" so much as "to be declared in right relationship to God." To be justified is to be regarded as in a covenant relationship with God and entitled to all the blessings of covenant keeping. What is radical about the biblical concept of justification is that someone else has kept the covenant relationship with God for us, the mediator Jesus Christ who put us in right relationship with God through his death. Faith is our only appropriate response to this gracious act of God. McGrath extols the beauty of faith:

While there will always be elements of "understanding" and "assent" in any Christian definition of faith, the element of "trust" (relationship!) must never be minimized. Faith is understood as a humble, obedient, and trusting response of the individual to the promises of God. Faith is, in its passivity, an active readiness to receive from God. Grace gives and faith receives (p. 28).

The biblical teaching on faith and justification comes to sharper focus for McGrath in two historical confrontations on the doctrine: Augustine and Pelagius in the fourth century and Martin Luther and Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. His discussion of Augustine and Pelagius is very competent. Yet it is excelled by his powerful discussion of Luther's evangelical breakthrough in the sixteenth century. The first step towards that breakthrough occurred when he discovered that "the righteousness of God" was not a synonym for God's righteous judgment and wrath (as medieval theology had taught) but rather was "a gift of God given to sinners":

Luther develops this understanding of the "righteousness of God" in terms of a "wonderful exchange" between Christ and the believer. Using the analogy of a human marriage, Luther argues that Christ and the believer are united through faith: Christ bestows his righteousness upon the believer, and the believer's sin is transferred to Christ. Luther thus speaks of a "grasping faith" (*fides apprehensiva*) a faith that grasps Christ and unites him to the individual believer, in order that this wonderful exchange of attributes may take place. Luther insists that justification involves a change in the individual's status before God, rather than a fundamental change in his nature . . . . It is this insight that underlies Luther's famous assertion that the believer is "righteous and a sinner at one and the same time" (*simul iustus et peccator*) (p. 52).

Subsequent debate down through the centuries since Luther has centered around the Lutheran/Reformed approach to justification which sees faith as a passive instrument in receiving justification ("justification *per fidem propter Christum*" – by means of faith but based on the work of Christ) and a more humanistic/arminian approach where faith is conceived of as the grounds of our justification (*propter fidem per Christum*) – on the basis of faith through Christ). These formulations are actually worlds apart theologically and the



evangelical understanding of God's gracious salvation can easily be lost if the more humanistic approach is taken.

How does this biblical and historical doctrine make an impact on modern man who is convinced that he has outgrown his need for Christianity? McGrath sees in the contemporary philosophies of existentialism and personalism, as well as in the current interest in social ethics, some effective points of contact for communicating justification by faith to the modern world. One example of this method of contextualizing justification, that of existentialism, will have to suffice.

Existentialism finds its point of departure in the concept of alienation. Albert Camus, the French existentialist philosopher, linked this alienation to a sense of lost innocence, "that we have been expelled from a homeland and are now unhappily wandering through history, trying to find a way to return" (p. 93). Existentialism warns against the unauthentic life that does not deal honestly with this alienation and the related dread of death and non-being that flows from it. Thus the person who spends his life steeped in materialism or hedonism or superficial thinking is an unauthentic person. Justification by faith speaks to the dilemma of alienation. As McGrath explains:

The gospel proclamation is addressed to those who want their existence to be fulfilled and meaningful. It analyzes the existential situation of humanity, and then proceeds to describe the means by which the individual's situation may be transformed. Not very far from the surface of an individual's existence lie deep and dark fears about the threat of death and extinction and about the seeming meaninglessness of life. The gospel exposes these, bringing them to the surface in order that they may be faced and dealt with. For the gospel confronts the human fear of death and meaninglessness by speaking of someone who faced and conquered death, lending dignity and meaning to it. More importantly, the gospel treats the natural human desire to avoid dying and death and to seek refuge in the world as the symptom of human alienation from an authentic way of existence—in other words, fear of death and its corollaries are regarded as an aspect of the fundamental and global human alienation from God (p. 93).

McGrath has written a stimulating and helpful book. Though he provides a detailed appendix giving a more in-depth theological description of justification, one is left wanting more. McGrath may be of help in satisfying that desire; he is the author of an authoritative two volume history of the doctrine of justification by faith published by Cambridge University Press, as well as a probing study of Luther's theology of the cross. And while this present book is a fine example of contextualizing historic doctrine for a modern *western* audience, it leaves much to be desired as a contextualized discussion of the doctrine for an *African* context. Yet it must be said that Africa has participated sufficiently in modern cultural trends world-wide to have absorbed some of the existential and personalist concerns identified by McGrath. The African preacher who is proclaiming the word of God to an urban and educated audience will find help here in McGrath's discussion. McGrath's lucid prose and model of contextual theologizing may well inspire an African evangelical

theologian to do his or her own investigation of this crucial doctrine and translate it into the richness of African culture and thought patterns so that this most liberating of evangelical doctrines may live again for a new generation of Africans.

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*Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics:  
Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age*  
by William J Larkin Jr  
(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988)  
401 pages; \$16.95

All over the world evangelicals are wrestling with how to do theology in a way that is culturally relevant and biblically based. Leading African theologians have identified this as one of the most important tasks facing the church in Africa. Dr Tite Tiénou has written, "One cannot, therefore, take a 'Biblical Theology' and apply it anywhere! A contextual approach is needed. . . . We must not spare any effort to reach that goal!" (*The Theological Task of the Church in Africa*, p. 28). Many writers have offered helpful suggestions for this task, but few have attempted to bring together the many diverse threads involved and to weave them into a complete hermeneutical method. William Larkin's *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* is just such an effort. Larkin is professor of Bible and Greek at Columbia Biblical Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, USA. The task he has set for himself is an immense one. He seeks nothing less than 1) to summarize the most recent thinking that is relevant to the hermeneutics of contextualization, and 2) to offer his own comprehensive guidelines for contextualization, based on a biblical theology of hermeneutics and culture.

The first half of the book is divided into four parts and traces the roots of the current debate over hermeneutics and biblical authority. After an introductory chapter raising the key issues, Larkin identifies the philosophical roots of current relativistic thinking. He then summarizes the contributions made toward a theology of contextualization, both by evangelicals and by non-evangelicals, from within the language sciences, the behavioral sciences, and the fields of theology, hermeneutics, exegesis and missiology.

Throughout this part of the book Larkin demonstrates a good understanding of the relevant material, and the section can be useful for getting a general

grasp of what different people are saying. Some of Larkin's summaries are excellent, and offer an adequate introduction into the thought of the writers under consideration. This is especially true when Larkin deals with other evangelicals. However, some of the remaining summaries of current thinking are not altogether clear. Sometimes Larkin does not give enough background information; at other times his overview seems to be a collection of individual thoughts without a coherent summary of the ideas of the person or movement being explained. And although there is a controlling theme to this first part of the book, it is not presented as clearly as it might have been. People, conferences and movements are explained individually with only a minimum attempt to show the relationship between them. Nevertheless, this section is useful overall as a convenient reference to the hermeneutical thinking of many of today's scholars, especially for someone who has already done reading and thinking in this area.

Many of the ideas for interpreting Scripture that Larkin surveys in the first part of the book are widely divergent and even in conflict with one another. Larkin's solution in the latter part of the book is to examine the Scriptures and to build a biblical theology of hermeneutics that will consider the key cultural questions. This biblical theology is divided into three parts: "Culture the Context," "God Who Communicates," and "Man the Interpreter."

In his discussion of "Culture the Context," Larkin observes that "the unity of humankind derived from their first parents is more basic than the diversity of cultural expression" (199). Because of this, the Scriptures, written in one time and place, can communicate with people in every culture. However, the fall of man (Genesis 3) has led to each culture setting up a "religious power center" opposed to God, which makes all cultures "unclean in themselves" (221). As a result, God judges "both the ethnocentrism they foster and the religious power center which energizes them. He calls his people to replace the false religious center with Jesus as Lord and to live as God's model culture, the church, in the midst of their culture" (222). Larkin's analysis of the Bible's teaching on culture is perceptive (though his unqualified characterization of all cultures as "unclean" may strike some as simplistic).

Larkin then spends three chapters discussing the "God Who Communicates." The Bible assumes that, though God reveals himself in events and people, he also reveals himself truly in human language; human language is able to communicate divine revelation. Language is "not assumed to be historically conditioned, but is unhesitatingly enlisted to communicate meaning over time" (228). Therefore, meaning is not found in "the sociolinguistic context" but "in the author's intended sense in regard to an extralinguistic referent, a sense conveyed by . . . words" (243, 244). Larkin's proof of this is Adam's use of language apart from any sociolinguistic context. This meaning "remains single and fixed according to God's intention as he first gave it" (252). What then is the role of culture in contributing to the meaning of the text? It provides

“vocabulary stock, but such a contribution serves rather than controls the divinely intended meaning” (261). Larkin closes his section on “God Who Communicates” with an excellent chapter reviewing the Bible’s own witness to its inspiration, inerrancy, and authority and explaining the work of the Spirit in illuminating the text for today.

In his two chapters on “Man the Interpreter” Larkin maintains that, by submitting to the authority of Scripture and seeking to understand its intended meaning, the interpreter can understand God’s single, fixed message in spite of his own preunderstanding. Interpreters must simply “set aside their cultural preunderstanding” and continually expose themselves to God’s Word to “find the plain and definite meaning of the text” (301) and to bring their own preunderstanding in line with the truths of the Bible. After the interpreter has “fully entered into the horizon of the text” (301) and has understood the Bible’s message, he can re-enter his own world to interpret and apply the text (309). First he must find the best words to express the meaning of the text in his world. Then he must reflect on the significance of the text and determine what is “bad news” and “good news” for his culture. Using Paul’s confrontation with the Epicureans and Stoics in Athens as a model (Acts 17), Larkin applies these steps to contextualization. Paul’s primary concern was the integrity of his message and the avoidance of syncretism, but he also constructively engaged the world-view of the Greeks and challenged them to change their religious power center.

In the last two chapters of the book, Larkin uses his biblical theology to “frame hermeneutical guidelines” for interpretation and application. He gives four steps: 1) *Overview*, which includes both an overview of the text and an overview of the interpreter’s own cultural preunderstanding; 2) *analysis* of the text’s grammar, literary forms, and historical-cultural background; 3) *interpretation*, by stating the message of the passage so that it fits the biblical context and so that it clearly speaks to the current culture, correcting it and meeting its needs; and 4) *application* of the teaching to particular contemporary situations through a change of attitudes, thought and behavior. He illustrates each step from several biblical passages and from different cultural contexts. This section was extremely valuable and showed the practicality of Larkin’s biblical theology.

Larkin has made a valuable contribution towards an evangelical hermeneutic of contextualization. It is clear that his greatest concern is to preserve biblical authority. He does this admirably by pointing out many often-ignored assumptions that the Bible makes about hermeneutics. But Larkin could have considerably strengthened his contribution by more thorough development at several key points.

For example, his strong emphasis on language not being historically conditioned seems to oversimplify the issue. Larkin has vigorously and correctly

contended that 1) the author does control the intended meaning and 2) meaning can be communicated over linguistic and cultural barriers. But in so doing he seems to have understated the degree to which the author's forms of communication are at least partially shaped by his culture and by historical circumstances. Consequently, he gives only limited attention to how the interpreter understands the cultural thought patterns of the biblical writer and how he evaluates his own cultural preunderstandings in order to adopt a biblical preunderstanding. Are there questions that the interpreter can ask himself to determine how well he has entered into the world view and preunderstanding of the biblical author? Is it possible that interpreters from different cultural backgrounds could both understand a text truly without understanding it in exactly the same way? These key questions are unanswered.

Larkin's lack of emphasis on the degree to which culture shapes thought can be seen when he explains that "extra-biblical background information should not be used to set aside Scripture's authoritative claims" (342). It seems that Larkin's desire to emphasize biblical authority may here have led to an oversimplification of a complex issue. The interpreter may not understand what the authoritative claims of the Bible really are without understanding certain extra-biblical information. A more complete presentation would have been for Larkin to demonstrate how to use background material to determine what the authoritative claims of a passage really are.

Larkin's principles for contextualization also need further development. The principles he gives in his chapter on "Interpretation and Application" and in the section on "Contextualization" in his biblical theology (319-321) contain many valuable ideas for the contextualization of theology. However, these pages are brief and left me feeling a need for further elaboration. For example, I would have liked to see him correlate his three principles for contextualization with the interpretation/application process and show how they would be applied to some of the cross-cultural examples of interpretation he lists later in the book.

Occasionally Larkin seems to make hermeneutical conclusions that force his biblical data into an already existing model of hermeneutics. For example, based on the use of the Old Testament by New Testament authors, he demonstrates that Scripture can have a meaning that is "single and fixed according to God's intention as he first gave it" and still be "alive with meaning for every age" (251-252). He maintains that this is true because the New Testament authors maintain a sharp distinction "between interpretation and application, between the meaning of a passage and its significance" (258). However, many of the examples he gives of the Scriptures preserving the distinction between interpretation/meaning and application/significance (262) actually seem to blur the distinction! I was left feeling that the New Testament's use of the Old Testament had been squeezed into an over-

simplified model of interpretation. While New Testament writers *do* seem to preserve some distinction between interpretation and application, they do not seem to have the same clear-cut categories that modern interpreters often use. In this respect Larkin has only scratched the surface of an issue on which evangelicals need to do more work: the use of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers as a model for a hermeneutic that is both relevant to the modern reader and true to God's intended meaning.

Another area where Larkin may have pushed his own hermeneutic beyond that established by the Bible itself is in the literary forms that might be found in the Bible. Larkin believes that certain literary forms, such as midrash, could not be found in an inerrant Bible because by their very nature they violate the biblical understanding of truth; they claim to be something they are not. Larkin is correct that the Bible's view of truth excludes any form of literature that would seek to deceive the reader. However, it may be possible to affirm this correspondence theory of truth and still see the Bible using forms of literature which were characterized by a non-Western subtlety that was fully understood in the original historical and cultural context.<sup>1</sup> In any case, in this area I did not find Larkin's brief discussion to be convincing.

In a later edition the book could be definitely strengthened by a clearer integration between the historical overview (chapters 2-12), the biblical theology (chapters 13-18) and the hermeneutical guidelines (chapters 19-20). The opening historical overview, for example, would be far more valuable if later in the book Larkin were to interact more specifically with the different persons and ideas there presented. Also the biblical theology discussion lays important groundwork for the hermeneutical guidelines, but the reader is often left to make the connections himself. Many of Larkin's arguments would be even more powerful if he were to make these connections more explicit.

However, these limitations only demonstrate that the subject of the hermeneutics of contextualization is extremely large, perhaps too large to be comprehensively studied in one book. Indeed, overall Larkin has attempted a formidable task and has done a good job. Anyone in Africa teaching hermeneutics or theology should closely study this book for its contributions to the contextualization of theology. The overview of the hermeneutical process in the last two chapters is especially useful, but will be fully appreciated only if the reader has first digested the biblical theology in chapters 13-18. In assigning readings from this book, teachers need to note that the complexity of Larkin's thought, vocabulary and sentence structure will make the reading difficult for students at the first degree level or lower.

If this is not the last word on the hermeneutics of contextualization, it is certainly a very helpful step forward. Larkin points the way towards how to do theology that is both biblically based and culturally relevant. The places where the presentation is underdeveloped demonstrate that there is still work

to be done in elaborating a hermeneutic for doing contextualized theology. African evangelical theologians will profit both from Larkin's positive contributions and from thinking through a fuller presentation of those areas where his treatment could have been strengthened.

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<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the biblical understanding of truth and the different literary forms that might be found in the Bible, see Kevin J Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, edited by D A Carson and John D Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), especially pages 73-75.