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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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Subscription Services: Mrs. Flo Gehman

Subscription Information: Subscription rates and ordering procedures are published on the inside back cover.

Purpose: *AJET* is published twice a year by Scott Theological College, a chartered private university in Kenya, in order to provide theological educators and students with evangelical articles and book reviews related to theology and ministry in Africa.

Publisher: Scott Theological College, the publisher of *AJET*, has been accredited by ACTEA since 1979 and has been chartered as a private university by the Commission for Higher Education in November 1997. Scott offers university level theological education with concentrations in Pastoral Studies, Christian Education and Missiology. A Master of Education is being launched in 2002.

AJET is indexed in *Christian Periodical Index; New Testament Abstracts* (Cambridge MA); *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, published by the American Theological Library Association, Chicago; *Theology in Context* (Institute of Missiology, Germany); and in *DIALOG Abstracts* (Cambridge MA). *AJET* is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Fl., Chicago, IL 60606, Email: atla@atla.com, WWW:<http://www.atla.com/>. *AJET* articles and information can be found on the web by searching "evangelical theology" or using the following address: www.ozemail.com.au/~anted/ajet.

SECRET OF SUCCESS IN MINISTRY

An AJET Editorial

Having invested years and wealth in training servants of the Lord in our Bible Colleges and Institutes, we desire nothing less than success. Over the years we have pondered the difference between those who prove successful in the ministry and those who fall by the wayside. Paul offered Timothy sound advice which applies to us.

If you are to succeed in ministry, you need to do the following:

1. Train yourself to be godly (1 Tim. 4:7,8).

The verb, "to be godly," means to be *reverent, respectful, devout*. Godliness as noble Christian character grows out of divine *worship*. Godliness begins with an attitude of *devotion to God*. Godliness is "a genuine reverence for God that governs one's attitude towards every aspect of life." It is out of this attitude of devotion to God that *godly character* arises.

Godliness requires *training*. The Greek word translated, *train*, was used in reference to *training in sports*. From this Greek word we derive our English word, *gymnasium*. Growth in godliness requires discipline like an athlete.

The secret (mystery) of godliness is *Jesus Christ* (1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus is the revelation of godliness. He embodied all that it means to be godly. He was the God-Man who prayed, trusted in his Father and submitted to his Father's will. His lips and life reflected the glory of God. The secret of being godly is to know Jesus Christ. Godliness is derived through abiding in Jesus (John 15:5).

The secret of godliness, therefore, is a strong private life of prayer and Bible study. "And we, who with unveiled faces all behold as in a mirror the Lord's glory, are *being transformed* into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). This training is continuous. "*Train yourself to be godly*" is in the present tense which means *keep on training yourself*. It is not enough to learn to be godly in

Bible College. One must continue the training day by day throughout life.

2. **Endure Hardship** (II Tim. 2:3-7).

“Hardship” refers literally to *suffering*. Life in ministry is full of suffering. These hardships include financial struggles, jealous leaders, slander, opposition to new ideas and church divisions.

Not only do Christian servants suffer, but Paul reminds us that soldiers, athletes and farmers also suffer. But they have learned to endure their hardships by keeping their eye on the goal (the harvest for the farmer, the victory wreath for the athlete and the approval of the commanding officer for the soldier).

Jesus is our perfect model, “who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Even as Jesus persevered in his suffering by keeping his eye on the goal, so must we. Failure to keep our eyes on the goal of pleasing the Lord will inevitably lead to failure because of the hardships which must be endured.

3. **Set an example for believers** (I Tim. 4:12).

Timothy was in his early or middle 30’s. Yet by Greek standards he was “young.” The Greek idea of age was similar to that found in Africa. Today most of our graduates from Bible Colleges are not older than Timothy.

How was Timothy to lead the elders? By living an exemplary life Timothy was to lead the church. Through his *lips* (speech) and *life* he was to lead.

Those ministers of the gospel who fail usually do so in one of three areas: *girls* (lust of the flesh), *gold* (lust of the eyes) and *glory* (pride of life).

In contrast, Paul exhorts Timothy to **purity**, both in body and in the mind, both in the sight of God and in the eyes of others. A life of **faith** will protect one from temptations of greed, covetousness and stealing. Instead of forsaking the ministry for material gain, one will prove faithful to God who called him. If you truly show **love** for others, you will serve humbly and without jealousy or self-seeking.

Perseverance is the key to success in ministry but you can only persevere if you keep on training yourself in godliness in all of life.

WILLIAM WADE HARRIS: PREMIER AFRICAN EVANGELIST

Watson A.O. Omulokoli

Professor Watson A.O. Omulokoli has become East Africa's premier church historian who has contributed significantly to the research of African church history. Since the year 1986 he has researched and published in AJET no less than seven significant articles on important people and events in African church history.

In this article Professor Omulokoli narrates for us the life and ministry of a remarkable African evangelist in West Africa during the early days of missionary work last century. What we need is other church historians to follow in the footsteps of Professor Omulokoli and research important people and events before they fade into the unknown past.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian ministry of William Wade Harris was "one of the most remarkable movements in the whole history of Christianity in Africa"¹ and the most outstanding mass movement to Christianity on the continent.² Like John Wesley of Methodism, Harris was a phenomenally successful Christian evangelist who did not pursue the goal of forming a church despite the fact that his ministry

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¹ Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964/1980), 492.

² David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), 20.

resulted in the conversion of masses of people. Although his preaching endeavours were carried out from the inception of his ministry in 1913 to the time of his death in 1929, the climax was in the years 1913-1915, with the Ivory Coast and southwestern Ghana as his main areas of operation. Estimates of those who were converted to Christ under his preaching vary considerably. Even when the figures are in the lower category of 60,000 to 100,000 converts,³ this was considered to be "a profound response to the man."⁴ Elsewhere, the number of those baptised was reckoned to be about 120,000 adults "in just over a year."⁵ The extent of his impact had no comparison, hence leading to viewing his success in contrast to the failure of the Roman Catholic European missionaries. In one verdict it was stated appropriately,

The Prophet Harris succeeded, where the missionaries had not, in persuading people to give up their indigenous form of worship. Whereas the Catholic missionaries who had been in the colony for the past two decades had succeeded in baptising only a few hundred people, Harris baptised what colonial administrators estimated at 100,000 to 120,000 people in about 1 year, the overwhelming majority of whom took the baptism as the beginning of their lives as Christians and either joined the missionary churches or sought to practice Christianity on their own.⁶

BIRTH AND EARLY LIFE

William Wade Harris was born around the year 1865⁷ in Graway

³ C.P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, vol. 4, 1914/1954: (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958/1964), 46.

⁴ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983/1992), 123.

⁵ David Barrett ed., "Who's Who of African Independent Church Leaders," *Risk* 7, no. 3 (1971), 27.

⁶ Sheila S. Walker, "The Message as the Medium: The Harrist Churches of the Ivory Coast and Ghana," in George Bond, Walton Johnson, and Sheila S. Walker eds., *African Christianity: Patterns of Religious Continuity* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9. It is not easy to arrive at an accurate date of birth of Harris. One source puts this at between 1850 and 1865. See, Sheila S. Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina

village near Cape Palmas in Liberia, near the border with the Ivory Coast. He was from the Grebo tribe and was born of parents who were tied to their African traditional background and had not taken interest in Christianity. Aware of the pace of change in the overall environment, his parents were eager that Harris should have some formal education. With this in view, when he was twelve years old, they arranged for him to go and start with a fellow Grebo, the Rev. Jesse Lowrie, while pursuing schooling. This Grebo host served in the dual capacities of a Methodist minister and the director of the school which was part of an American Methodist Mission at Sinoe.⁸

Under these favourable living conditions and circumstance, Harris gained much formal education. This included learning to read and write in both Grebo and English. In addition to these elements, he received Christian instruction and as an indication of conversion, was eventually baptised at the age of 21 years in the Methodist Church tradition. This Methodist background, his conversion at the age of 21 under the agency of Rev. Lowrie, and the accompanying baptism, were so dear to Harris that they formed a very significant part of his spiritual pilgrimage.⁹

INITIAL CAREER AND WORKING LIFE

Because of their proximity to the sea, many Grebo young men were easily attracted to working as crewmen as an occupation, whether for a shorter or longer period. Harris was no exception to this tendency. Consequently, it was not surprising that like most of his contemporaries, he took to the sea and became "a member of a crew of one of the British ships that plied the West African coast and had the opportunity to visit other African countries"¹⁰ including Nigeria, in the process.

Following this stint of employment as a crewman on ships, Harris returned home and started settling down. As part of this process, he took up the occupation of being a brick mason. In another major step, Harris "married Rose Badick Farr, with whom he had six

Press, 1983), 12.

⁸ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 13.

⁹ Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, 123-124.

¹⁰ Walker, "The Message as the Medium," in *African Christianity*, 9.

children" over the years.¹¹ There were two more significant developments in his life. In one direction, through the influence of a Liberian minister, Rev. Thompspon, he became a lay minister in the Methodist Church. In another direction, he coupled this role as a Methodist Church lay minister with the responsibility of serving as teacher in his former school at the Mission.¹² After many years of association with the Methodists,¹³ however, his orientation was more and more towards the Episcopal Church in Liberia. While there is some confusion as to the exact dates and chronology of the changeover from association with the employment by the Methodists to his tenure of service with the Episcopalians, it is clear that he worked with Episcopalians for a definite period of time after his Methodist phase. First, Harris left Methodism and underwent confirmation as a member of the American Protestant Episcopal Mission. It is then pointed out that,

Harris left his job as a brick mason to become an assistant school-teacher at the American Protestant Episcopal mission in half-Graway in 1892. In this position he taught reading and writing for ten years. He was then put in charge of the Spring Hill School in Graway. Later he took charge of a boarding school in Half Graway, where he was responsible for sixteen pupils. In addition, he acquired the influential position of government interpreter.¹⁴

Together with the ecclesiastical shift which Harris made, there was a profound socio-political change which affected his future

¹¹ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 13.

¹² G.O.M. Tasié, "Christian Awakening in West Africa 1914-1918: A Study in the Significance of Native Agency," in O.U. Kalu, ed., *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, (London: Longman, 1980), 296. Just as in the case of his birth, there is lack of clarity regarding the years in which Harris worked with the Methodists, vis-à-vis, his period with Episcopalians. Here, the confusion is compounded when his period of service as a Methodist schoolteacher is given as 1892-1909. Cf. Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 14. The claim here is that he became an Episcopal schoolteacher in 1892.

¹³ The sequence of events in the life of Harris between his job as a crewman and his prison years is clouded. See above. Also, Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 13 and Groves, vol. 4, 45.

¹⁴ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 45.

drastically. The assignment which he assumed as a government interpreter was double-edged. While it was a very influential position in society, at the same time it involved dealing with sensitive issues which had a lot of potential for controversy in the critical socio-political sphere. Involvement in this area led to a crisis whose results eventually made a lasting impact on his life, career, and ultimate mission and legacy.

PREVAILING SOCIO-POLITICAL CLIMATE

Liberia was made up of essentially two groups of people. On the one hand, there was a small, but dominant population of African-American settlers. In principle, these were also the rulers of Liberia. At the same time, there was also a large section of the original indigenous inhabitants or indigenous Liberians. Over a long period of time, the indigenous population was disenchanted with the fact that they were being ruled by the African-American sector of the Liberian population. The disaffection which the Grebo, in particular, had with the Liberian government was partly based on bitterness about treaty violations. Those young men who had worked on British ships and visited British colonies as crew members were in the forefront in agitating for British rule instead of the existing Liberian government. Harris seemed to share this position. In the latter part of the 1800s, there were four wars between the Grebo and the government as a result of this state of affairs.¹⁵

The strained political picture was compounded by the prevailing emphases in Christian work. While the American Methodist Mission worked among all groups and even had indigenous people in prominent leadership positions, as in the case of Rev. Jesse Lowrie, Harris's teacher and mentor, "the Methodist missionaries in Liberia catered particularly to the Afro-American settlers."¹⁶ On the other hand, while the American Protestant Episcopal Mission included settlers in its Christian work, it concentrated much of its efforts on the indigenous population. In the sphere of education, the Episcopal Church put a lot of emphasis on schooling for both adults

¹⁵ Walker, "The Message as the Medium," in *African Christianity*, 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10

and children with special attention given to learning to read and write in their own language as well as in English. The Episcopal Church was equally zealous in the training and ordaining of indigenous clergy. The first of those in this category were S.W. Kla Seton and M.P. Keda Valentine who were ordained in 1865.¹⁷ In the area of language work,

Episcopal missionaries learned the Grebo language, devised a system of notation for it, and starting in 1839, published a Grebo-English dictionary and four hundred hymns and part of the gospels and prayer books in the language, as well as holding church services in Grebo.¹⁸

After identifying with the Episcopal Church, Harris was confirmed as a member there. Just as he had done when he was with the Methodist, he became a lay preacher once he settled in the Episcopal fold. Furthermore, he took up employment as a school teacher in the Episcopal Mission educational system and added to this the role of being a government interpreter. This latter responsibility was very influential, but also politically sensitive with serious potential for controversy. Indeed, it was while discharging his duty as a government interpreter that he landed into problems with the government.

TURMOIL, IMPRISONMENT AND NEW MISSION

Through incidents, which took place in 1909, he got into serious trouble when his attitude and actions were taken to be anti-government. All this began when he had been appointed a peacemaker between two groups, which were antagonistic towards each other. Instead of being neutral, he sided with the faction which was hostile to the one favoured by the government. As a result of this friction, he was accused of disloyalty and dismissed from his role as a government interpreter. When the situation worsened, he revolted and expressed great displeasure at the treatment which was being meted out to him, and went on to style himself as the

¹⁷ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

“Secretary of the Graway people.”¹⁹

In the prevailing atmosphere of discontentment on the part of the Grebo people with the Americo-Liberian government, Harris was now being targeted by the establishment as one of the leaders of a suspected revolt. Matters finally came to a head on 11th or 13th February, 1909, when Harris came into direct collision with the government, was arrested, and jailed. As has been claimed, on this occasion,

With a band of followers he lowered the Liberian flag and raised the British flag in its place, on Paduke Beach near Hooper, while his supporters shouted insults at Americo-Liberian onlookers. He was arrested, convicted of treason, and imprisoned for more than a year.²⁰

Whatever Harris might have gone through earlier, the most significant turning point in his life sprang from his experiences in prison. In the period in which he was in prison, he underwent a profound spiritual experience which was to transform him, his life, and his career with far-reaching consequences for all concerned. He used much of his time in prison to engage in earnest zealous prayer and in serious study of the Bible. In time, this laid the foundation when he reportedly experienced a vision. It has been observed that,

In prison he spent a good deal of time praying and reading the Bible. One day, while praying, he had a vision of the Angel Gabriel telling him that he had been chosen by God to preach his Word to all people who had not yet heard the Christian message.²¹

Further details of the vision and new mission included serving God in a manner similar to that in which the prophet Elijah had shouldered his responsibilities for God in his time. In the case of Elijah, as he went about championing the cause of God, he confronted the prophets of Baal and triumphed over them. Moreover, in spreading the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, Harris was charged with the task of baptising those who were converted as a result of his preaching. Indeed, this element of

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*

baptism was to become a pivotal undertaking in his ministry.

LAUNCHING OF THE NEW MISSION IN LIBERIA

When he emerged out of prison changed, Harris was quite clear about what his new mission entailed. Convinced that he had a responsibility to ensure that his nation of Liberia was reached with the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, he embarked on preaching ventures there, with the capital of Monrovia as his launching ground. He did not fare well in his home country, with his preaching activities being “met with ridicule”²² from the people, and with opposition and hostility from the government. This hostile and scornful treatment degenerated into a further brief period of imprisonment. As he set out on his preaching campaign in Liberia, he was armed “with an extensive knowledge of the contents of the Bible”, but was accused of being a disturber of the peace and imprisoned again briefly.²³

Although in practice Harris was now acting in a new and different capacity, his previous political record began to catch up with him and to raise fears in the minds of those connected with authority. Trouble with the government seemed imminent so he was forced to leave Liberia and to cross to the Ivory Coast, the neighbouring French territory.²⁴

On embarking on his preaching ministry after the vision in prison, Harris had a completely changed outlook on life. This included his mode of dressing as well as the entire way in which he carried himself about. All this distinguished him as an identifiable messenger of God in the context of his environment and time. “He had an outfit made for himself consisting of a long white gown with black bands crossed across the chest and a little round white hat, perhaps inspired by pictures of biblical prophets.”²⁵ Apart from his mode of dressing, he had some unique articles which he carried along with him in the course of his work. These included, “a gourd

²² Walker, “The Message as the Medium,” in *African Christianity*, 10.

²³ Groves, vol. 4, 45.

²⁴ Tasié, “Christian Awakening in West Africa,” in *History of Christianity in West Africa*, 297.

²⁵ Walker, “The Message as the Medium,” in *African Christianity*, 10.

rattle, a gourd bowl for baptismal water, a tall staff in the form of a cross, and his Bible."²⁶ This was part of the portrait of Harris as he turned his back on Liberia after rejection and headed to the Ivory Coast in 1913. It seems as if his wife had died before he left Liberia for these outside preaching engagements. Accompanying him as co-workers and assistants were two female companions.²⁷

The people of the territory in which he carried out his ministry were steeped in African traditional culture and religion. As one who represented the Christian faith as such rather than a particular denomination, the core of his message was simple and direct. Wherever he went, he challenged his listeners to abandon their traditional religion and to embrace the "worship of one God and salvation in Jesus Christ."²⁸ Those who accepted his message and turned to Jesus Christ were baptised immediately without undergoing any further teaching and preparation. Through this process, his ministry proved singularly successful. In his approach,

Harris's technique was that he and his followers would enter a village singing songs and accompanying themselves with gourd rattles. When a crowd gathered Harris would preach his message. If people agreed to renounce their former religion and worship as Harris preached, he would baptise them with water from his gourd bowl, placing the Bible on their heads.²⁹

HEIGHTENED EFFORTS IN THE IVORY COAST AND GHANA

The preaching venture in the Ivory Coast commenced in 1913. Here, his geographical areas of concentration were those of the coastal sections to the south. The ethnic groups living in the lagoons "between Grand Lahou and Bingerville" received special

²⁶ *Ibid*, 11

²⁷ Deji Ayegboyan and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Lagos: Greater Heights Publications, 1997/1999), 51. See Also, Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 15. In some quarters these were mistaken for wives.

²⁸ Sanneh, 123.

²⁹ Walker, "The Message as the Medium," in *African Christianity*, 12.

attention in this evangelistic thrust.³⁰ By and large, the situation there was such that the population he preached to was made up of people whose lives were governed by the African traditional religion and who had not had much opportunity to hear about salvation in Christ.

In 1914 he travelled to southwestern Ghana where he preached for about three months, with the area of Apollonia as his main focus. From this brief foray into Ghana he returned to the Ivory Coast where he continued with his earlier work. In both the Ivory Coast and Ghana in the period of 1913 to 1915 his "mission was a phenomenal success" with thousands embracing the Christian faith.³¹ Both the government and the Roman Catholic Church in the Ivory Coast were initially suspicious about the preaching activities of Harris. The government soon allowed him to proceed with his mission for the time being. On their part, Roman Catholic superiors disagreed with him because of his methods, but only "appreciated him because the number of people seeking to join the mission churches had been increasing by leaps and bounds since the Prophet had begun directing his converts to them."³² In the end,

The Prophet Harris succeeded, where the missionaries had not, in persuading people to give up their indigenous form of worship. Whereas the Catholic missionaries who had been in the colony for the past two decades had succeeded in baptising only a few hundred people, Harris baptised what colonial administrators estimated at 100,000 to 120,000 people in about 1 year, the overwhelming majority of whom took the baptism as the beginning of their lives as Christians and either joined the missionary churches or sought to practice Christianity on their own.³³

In the case of Ghana, during his brief ministry there, estimates are that about ten thousand converts came to Jesus Christ in the target area of activity. Since he had no interest in establishing his own churches, Harris directed the new converts to join the surrounding established Protestant Churches. As a result of his preaching, influence, and directive, members in the churches in question

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 16.

³² Walker, "The Message as the Medium," in *African Christianity*, 12.

³³ *Ibid.*

“increased phenomenally.”³⁴ The Methodists, in particular, gained immensely from this entire process. A case in point is what took place in the centre of operation of Apollonia. When a Methodist missionary, the Rev. Charles Armstrong arrived there, he “found 8,000 Harris converts in Apollonia in early August 1914, all waiting for Christian instruction. Harris had passed through that area a few weeks earlier.”³⁵

Just when his labours in the Ivory Coast were experiencing immense success, the government became fearful about the large masses of people that were flocking to hear his preaching. It has been alleged that the government was apprehensive about the political implications of the large crowds which were trekking in from everywhere to benefit from his Christian work and ministry. The fact that many of the people streaming in to hear him in this French colony were from the British colony of Ghana was particularly worrying the government. The answer that they arrived at was expulsion. As has been explained,

Fears about the political implications of Harris’s activity in the Ivory Coast were very strong. Harris was expelled from the Ivory Coast, and the French colonial government claimed it was in order to avoid local unrest. It is noteworthy that at the time of his arrest in 1915 he was holding a service and conducting baptisms at Port Buœt, near Abidjan, the capital. A soldier and a boy who had accompanied the officer who was to arrest him became converted and were baptised before Harris was led away.³⁶

The emphatic and firm expulsion of Harris took place when he “was quietly conducted some 300 miles away to the Liberian frontier and forbidden to return.”³⁷ Desirous of following up on his work and converts in the Ivory Coast, Harris attempted to return there severally. On each occasion he was turned away at the border by French guards who were in charge of entry points. This meant that his ministry was now essentially restricted to his home land of

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Sanneh, 124.

³⁶ Tasie, “Christian Awakening in West Africa,” in *History of Christianity in West Africa*, 298-299.

³⁷ Groves, vol. 4, 46.

Liberia. The exception to this was a brief visit which he paid to Sierra Leone in 1917. During this short preaching mission his impact was minimal,³⁸ falling far below the success which he had registered in his main operational territories in the Ivory Coast and in Ghana.

CLOSING DAYS OF MINISTRY IN LIBERIA

Once he returned to Liberia in 1915, Harris resumed his preaching endeavours in his home country. While the tempo of his ministry slowed down and was occasional rather than continuous, nonetheless, he maintained preaching as his main work throughout the rest of his life from the time of his expulsion from the Ivory Coast. To accomplish this, he travelled far and wide throughout the country. Because his success in Liberia was not as phenomenal as had been the case in his early ministry in the Ivory Coast and in Ghana, it has been mistakenly assumed in some quarters that once he was expelled to his country, "the rest of his life seems to have been spent in obscurity."³⁹ While it is true that his ministry there was not spectacular, he still carried on with it, and did not disappear from the scene.

As he went about his work, his ministry had the greatest effect on those people who had an African traditional background and who in their perception welcomed him as an authentic messenger of God. It was among the African-American settlers and the African elite that his effect was least pronounced. This was not unexpected since most of those in this sector of society considered him to be a misguided religious fanatic who was not worth giving attention to.

Despite the fact that Christian missions working in Liberia benefitted immensely from his ministry, they were reluctant to recognise his work readily. In keeping with his pattern of operation as one who was mainly committed to evangelism, he would preach, and when people were converted, he baptised them, and then went

³⁸ Because his evangelistic activities in Liberia in the later period did not meet with impressive and spectacular results, there has been a tendency of assuming mistakenly that there was no activity at all.

³⁹ Tasié, "Christianity Awakening in West Africa," in *History of Christianity in West Africa*, 299. See Also, Neil, 493.

on to direct them to existing Protestant missions. Once they joined these missions, however, they would be rebaptised. In one incident, his preaching registered remarkable results with about five hundred people being converted and baptised on that single occasion.⁴⁰

When he was not going around on his preaching journeys, he lived quietly at home. His main preoccupation was that of service to God and to the people to whom he had been sent. This was the state of affairs when Harris, "rejected as a prophet by Liberians, died unknown and in poverty, 10 October, 1929."⁴¹ At his death he was materially a poor man, but one who had won a rich harvest of converts for Jesus Christ. As has been appropriately captured regarding his life in Liberia,

He had returned as poor as when he left; when gifts were pressed upon him, he would straight away distribute them to the poor around. He was just a prophet of the Word, and found his deep satisfaction in his obedience to his Lord.⁴²

STRATEGIES FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CONVERTS

Harris was seriously concerned about the spiritual well-being and welfare of those who had been converted under his ministry. Aware of the fact that even if he wanted to, he could not be with them forever, he had devised some operational strategies which would enable them to survive on their own in subsequent days. The preliminary follow-up system started right at the time of their actual conversion when indelible means of initiation were employed. First, the Bible was placed on the heads of those who were ready to be baptised. Secondly, those who were converted were baptised immediately, with Harris using the water which he had carried in his gourd bowl.

Following conversion and initiation, Harris instructed his converts on some elementary truths and practices. To begin with, he stressed to them that they should observe Sunday seriously as the Sabbath, which they were to dedicate exclusively to worship and rest.

⁴⁰ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 16.

⁴¹ Barrett, "Who's Who," in *Risk*, 27

⁴² Groves, vol. 4, 46.

Secondly, he set the pattern which his appointed assistants would later follow by teaching the converts some foundational truths which included instruction in the "Ten commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and Protestant hymns."⁴³ Furthermore, he impressed upon them the importance of leading ethico-moral and upright lives which were free from "theft, lying, adultery, and drunkenness."⁴⁴

In all this, Harris insisted "that he was not a minister and did not intend to found a church."⁴⁵ For this reason, in areas where mission churches existed and were accessible to converts, he urged them to join these churches and find nurture within their confines, whether these churches were Roman Catholic or Protestant in orientation. Where there was a vacuum and there were no immediate prospects of such churches, the converts were to "build their own houses of prayer."⁴⁶ In one approach, when he met Methodist clerks, he entrusted them with the responsibilities of taking care of the new churches because he considered them to be responsible Christians. He would even charge them with the task of going into new areas where, after preaching, they would baptise converts, organise them into churches in which they would then gather to sing, pray, and worship in a Christian manner.⁴⁷

Beyond existing mission churches and the agency of Methodist clerks, Harris tried to work out a novel plan of oversight for the churches. To ensure that there was a reliable structure for adequate leadership and pastoral care in this system, he arranged for each of these houses of prayer to have a minister assisted by 12 apostles who were chosen to this role by the community in the village. There are times when many areas and villages, which Harris had never visited, entered the movement and set up their own structures through which they promoted the ideals of the movement. The pattern was such that,

In many cases far away villages sent delegates to hear the Prophet, be baptised by him, and return to share the new religious teachings with their fellow villagers. This was one of the ways in which Harris's

⁴³ Walker, in *African Christianity*, 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 14

⁴⁵ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 45.

⁴⁶ Walker, in *African Christianity*, 14.

⁴⁷ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 44.

teachings penetrated to areas that he did not visit.⁴⁸

Equipping the converts with hope for the future, he counselled them to be steadfast in their faith, while waiting for teachers who would arrive later with Bibles and who would be able to explain the content therein. In this all-important legacy, "The Prophet Harris also told his converts that 'teachers with Bibles' would come to teach them the contents of the book and how to be good Christians."⁴⁹ Together with the preparation which Harris had already given them, the prospects of knowledgeable teachers would prove to be a strong pillar for them in the Christian faith.

MEASURES FOR MAINTAINING THE FAITH

On their part, the new converts were to ensure that they were able to perpetuate their Christian faith. This was especially true in the face of extreme danger and harassment. In the case of the Ivory Coast, after the expulsion of Harris, the government set out to eliminate his nascent movement. In the first instance, the authorities "went from village to village informing the people of the order and setting fire to their bamboo and thatch houses."⁵⁰ The movement proved to be too resilient to capitulate to these repressive measures by the government. Everywhere in the areas affected, those who had been converted persisted. A number of steps and practices which they took helped strengthen them in this struggle.

First, the construction of their own churches where none were available was a very serious issue. Even when their initial churches made of temporary building material were destroyed by the government, they constructed more permanent ones made of stone or bricks. Secondly, the Bible had a crucial central role in the life of the movement. Although most of them could not read because they were illiterate, in anticipation of teachers with Bible expertise who would come in the future, they "secured a Bible for each"⁵¹ church. Thirdly, in keeping with the emphasis of the founder, Sunday was

⁴⁸ Walker, in *African Christianity*, 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁰ Tasié, in *History of Christianity in West Africa*, 299.

⁵¹ Groves, vol. 4, 46.

observed with strict seriousness as a day of worship and rest. In this direction,

The prophet was particularly adamant about the observance of the Sabbath... The founders of the Harrist church wanted the new Christians to become thoroughly imbued with this religion and wanted them to have no activities that might distract them from attending church on Sunday and spending the day worshipping God. The prohibition continues in effect today, and most Harrists do spend a good portion of the day attending church, resting, and sometimes attending Harrist gatherings at which they sing and dance.⁵²

Then, allied to faithfulness in observing Sunday as God's day of worship is the importance of worship itself as a communal practice. To ensure adherence to worship on this day, many groups bought bells and appointed bell-ringers to help summon people to worship services. This they persisted in doing even when their employers tried to make conditions hard for them. They followed the practice in which,

Assembling in God's house the people knelt in prayer. The official "preacher", an unlearned man, would lead them. They attempted singing snatches of the songs in pidgin English they had managed to learn, broke out in a song in their own language. The preacher would repeat what they had heard Harris or one of his envoys say.⁵³

GAINS BY EXISTING MISSION CHURCHES

In the Ivory Coast

Existing mission churches gained immensely from the evangelistic labours of Harris. It is for this reason that in the case of the Ivory Coast, it has been rightly asserted that all Ivorian Christians are Harris converts. This is not much of an exaggeration in that when Harris arrived Roman Catholics numbered only a few hundred, and these were the only Ivorian Christians in existence upon his arrival. When his ministry there was over, the figure was

⁵² Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 110

⁵³ Tasié, in *History of Christianity in West Africa*, 299.

in tens of thousands by conservative estimates.⁵⁴

Harris had made it clear that since he was not a minister, he had no intention of starting or founding his own Church. In areas where mission churches were in existence, he urged his followers to join these churches. Where there were no established churches, he counselled them to build their own churches and worship there regularly. As they did this, they were to hold onto their Bibles while waiting for teachers who would come "to unlock the Scriptures for them."⁵⁵ In the end, in the ivory Coast four main categories emerged out of the fruits of this movement. These were, the Roman Catholic Church which gained the most, mainline Protestant Churches as represented essentially by Methodists, the Harrist Church which claimed allegiance to Harris, and many new movements with separate existence.⁵⁶

Even with all these groupings, it was not possible to cope with the influx of converts from this movement. In consequence of this, many fell by the wayside, mainly out of neglect or in the face of the severe persecution which the government unleashed against them. This was especially true in the aftermath of the expulsion of Harris when "the colonial administration decided to suppress such indigenous religious autonomy by arresting disciples and village leaders and destroying the churches or turning the finer structures over to the Catholic missionaries."⁵⁷

The Roman Catholic Church: As is to be expected, in the Ivory Coast the Roman Catholic Church gained most from the evangelistic endeavours of Harris. Most of those who sought for churches to go to found that these were the only churches available. In certain instances, however, some who went to these churches left them in disillusionment since, in their view, they did not measure up to the stipulations of Harris. This happened when they, "finding no Bible

⁵⁴ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 56. See also, Walker, "The Message is the Medium," in *African Christianity*, 18-19.

⁵⁵ Sanneh, 123. See Also Groves, vol. 4, 46. The issue of teachers, white men or missionaries, either with Bibles or knowledge of the Bible was critical to the future welfare of the converts.

⁵⁶ Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 56.

⁵⁷ Walker, in *African Christianity*, 18.

in evidence in the Catholic Church they visited, concluded that Harris would not want them to go there because of the absence of the book."⁵⁸ Such exceptions notwithstanding, the tens of thousands of converts who were urged to join existing churches ended up in the Roman Catholic Church as the only option on the scene. The final outcome was such that because of the large numbers of people joining the Church, it grew by leaps and bounds, with the complication that "it was far beyond the capacity of the few missionaries present to minister to this multitude of people whom they had been unable to attract on their own."⁵⁹

The Methodist Church: When it came to the Methodist Church, virtually from nothing, it gained a large membership in the Ivory Coast. Since most of the Methodists there were converts from the Harris era, the Church dates its beginnings from the height of his ministry in 1914. In reality, however, the Methodists arrived there ten years later in 1924. As if reaping where they did not sow, on their arrival when they "were enthusiastically welcomed by village after village of 'Harrist Protestants' as the 'teachers with Bibles,' they were immediately overwhelmed by people seeking to join their churches," hardly before their churches were off the ground.⁶⁰

In 1923 and 1924, a Methodist missionary, Rev. William J. Platt toured the Ivory Coast, trying to assess the need for help. He was overwhelmed by what he encountered as he "visited an estimated forty villages and preached to more than eleven thousand people."⁶¹ By the time the Methodists responded to Platt's appeal in 1925, "the French authorities had subjected many Harris converts to severe persecution and restricted their movement. Despite all this, it is claimed that some 50,000 people joined the Church when the Methodists opened one in the Ivory Coast."⁶²

In Ghana

The Roman Catholic Church: Representing the Roman Catholic

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Walker, *Religious Revolution*, 61.

⁶² Sanneh, 124.

Church in Ghana, the Catholic Missionary Society of Lyons had been working in the Nzima region since 1908. Between the years 1916 and 1921, the priest in charge, Fr. George Fischer, "gathered some 4,000 Harris converts" into his church.⁶³ Out of the spiritual movement initiated by Harris, the Roman Catholics were able to establish about 40 mission stations in Nzima and about another 10 along the Tana river in the 1920's.

The Anglican Church: The Anglican Church received into its ranks a substantive number of the followers of Harris. Two of its workers, the Rev. E.D. Marthinson and C. D. Elliott normally operated from Sefwi as their base. Following the spiritual outbreak under Harris, they were kept very busy as they tried to work among the converts. In this task, they found one of the followers of Harris, John Swatson, a most useful ally. He was already in the process of forging together large numbers of the converts into Anglican Church communities. He claimed that this was in keeping with the instructions of Harris. With the original Christ Church at Cape Coast as the pattern, these new Anglican communities were named "Christ Church" villages.⁶⁴

The Methodist Church: In Ghana, apart from Roman Catholics and Anglicans, the other group, which really benefitted from the evangelistic activities under Prophet Harris was the Methodist Church in Ghana. As soon as its leaders came in touch with the Harris movement, the Methodists recognised that this field provided a tremendous opportunity for ready Christian converts.

In Axim, one Methodist minister, the Rev. Ernest Bruce, was exuberant in his observations on the impact of the movement in areas which had been visited by Harris. He noted that the movement was characterised by deep Christian commitment. Among other things, there was a proliferation of make-shift chapels and churches, there was a great thirst for God's Word, and insatiable hunger for

⁶³ Sanneh, 124-125. For the section on benefits to mission churches in Ghana this paper has relied heavily on Sanneh's *West African Christianity*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

the songs of Zion was evident everywhere on the horizon.⁶⁵

The area of Apollonia was greatly affected by the movement following the visit of Harris through there. Not long after the presence of Harris in the area, a Methodist missionary, the Rev. Charles Armstrong, arrived there. He was astounded to find about 8,000 resultant Christian converts waiting for Christian instruction in the early part of August, 1914.⁶⁶

In Ghana's Cape Coast area, the number of converts was staggering. When the Methodist attempted to give assistance to the converts there, they were hampered in this exercise by two serious problems, one internal, and the other external. On one hand, there was the familiar internal limiting factor of shortage of personnel. On the other hand, there was the external interference in the form of new restrictions which the French had introduced when they banned the use of English and the local languages, in the case of this area, Fanti and Nzima, in the face of the First World War (1914-1918).⁶⁷

Despite the twin barriers of shortage of manpower and language restrictions, Methodists maintained interest in the lot of Harris's converts in Nzima area. In one instance, the Rev. William Goudie visited Nzima and was able to witness for himself the results of Harris's ministry. Over the years, Methodist numbers increased three times. All the same, as late as 1923 or about ten years since the initiatives of Harris, it was evident that due to lack of effective mobilization and harnessing, "large numbers of Harris converts were still without a church."⁶⁸

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The central element in the life of William Wade Harris was his evangelistic enterprise in the countries of Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and Ghana. The period relevant to this preaching ministry commenced with his divine call and commission while in prison in 1910 and ended with his death in 1929. It was while he was in prison that God appeared to him in a vision and charged him with

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 124

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the task of preaching the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. He then embarked on this evangelistic venture as soon as he came out of prison, launching it in Monrovia in his own home country of Liberia. Following ridicule, rejection, and further imprisonment, he crossed over to neighbouring Ivory Coast in 1913 where he continued with his preaching work.

As he went about on his preaching mission, he found ample assistance from the numerous local teachers and evangelists who emerged out of his own efforts. They stood by him steadfastly in many ways, including interpreting for him as he preached in pidgin - English in varied localities. Urging those he preached to abandon their traditional religious allegiance and practices, he invited them to the two-fold commitment of the worship of God and salvation in Jesus Christ. Tens of thousands responded positively, and in keeping with their conversion, he baptised them immediately, using water which he carried around with him in his gourd container.

To ensure that their future spiritual well-being was taken care of, Harris urged the converts to join the existing churches since, not being a minister, he did not intend to found a Church. Where such churches were not in existence, he counselled them to build their own churches in which they would worship faithfully, while waiting for teachers who would come later to unfold to them the message of the Bible. After his expulsion from the Ivory Coast in 1915, he returned to his home in Liberia. Here, he continued with his preaching mission, albeit at a slow tempo. This was the state of affairs when he died in 1929 in relative obscurity and in material poverty.

His preaching enterprise was so effective that it was accompanied by phenomenal success. While estimates of those converted under his ministry vary, it is generally agreed that the figures were staggering. A colonial administrator at one time estimated that those converted and baptised under his preaching in one year numbered about 100,000 to 120,000. Those who have sought explanations for this phenomenal success have been at a loss on how to account for his effectiveness. He was indeed a pioneer, premier African Christian evangelist whose movement was adjudged to be "not simply a revival but a Pentecost."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

As a pioneer, premier African Christian evangelist, Harris burst onto the scene of African Church history with a drastically new approach to evangelism - "it was indiscreet, imprudent and undiplomatic" - but immensely effective and successful.⁷⁰ God had endowed in him such spiritual resources that were employed for the promotion of God's work in the territory which he traversed. All this he carried out with a demeanor which was seen in terms of a "simple but powerful life-style."⁷¹

On the personal level, he was imbued with zeal and a deep sense of Christian conviction. This purposeful spiritual posture seemed to be fuelled by an extensive knowledge of the Bible, a secret which enabled him to seek in it "explanations examples, and proofs to support"⁷² all he said and did. It was clear that verses borrowed from the Scriptures formed the very bedrock on which his faith was built and nourished. As a contemporary missionary described the essence of his being, "He lives in a supernatural world in which the people, the ideas, the affirmations, the cosmology and the eschatology of the Bible are more real than the things he sees and hears materially."⁷³

This personal disposition in turn had a telling effect on his evangelistic ventures. It was for this reason that as he preached "his hearers felt that the power of the unseen God was with him; they heard and obeyed."⁷⁴ In a moving assessment of the man and his career, the verdict has been made that,

His soul moved on a higher plane, and that he was a dynamic force of a rare order and a man who would move his age in a new way. His impact on those who came within his hearing was electric, and the effect he wrought on those whose souls he touched was permanent.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Tasié, in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, 297.

⁷¹ Sanneh, 124.

⁷² Walker, *The Religious Revolution*, 20.

⁷³ Tasié, in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, 297.

⁷⁴ Neill, 492

⁷⁵ Sanneh, 124. It has been commented that in his approach "he showed striking gifts of prophecy and healing; he adopted a less intellectual and more down-to-earth style of oratory; and fearlessly and uncompromisingly he condemned African traditional religion, including all that seemed to be symbols of the pagan faith - magic, the medicine-man, the priests, etc." Tasié, in *The History of Christianity in West Africa*, 297.

THE EVANGELIST AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Dela Adadevoh

In the previous article on a "Premier African Evangelist", we were introduced to a remarkable African evangelist of one hundred years ago. In this article the present day church is challenged to continue engaging in bold and biblical evangelism. But we are reminded that powerful evangelism can only grow out of a spiritually awakened church. This article was originally presented to the delegates of Amsterdam 2000 Conference of Itinerant Evangelists, July 29 - August 6, 2000.

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual awakening is a special work of the Holy Spirit among a people in creating an unusual awareness and openness to Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Lord. Spiritual awakening is usually attended by supernatural activities of God, as acts of love, and demonstrations of His power. Spiritual awakening is usually preceded by or includes revival amongst God's people. Revival is primarily God's activity in His Church, whilst spiritual awakening is what God does in Church and society, usually resulting in unprecedented harvest.

Revival results in:

- An exalted view of God and His glory among God's people. This is made possible by an act of grace on God's part in opening the spiritual eyes of His people (Eph. 1:3).
- A renewed hunger for holiness.

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- A deepened commitment to obeying God.
- A deepened commitment to evangelism and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Revival is the sovereign act of God. However, God prepares His people for such revival. The people of God must always be ready for revival. This readiness or preparedness for revival and spiritual awakening is our responsibility. This is what we need to address.

The leadership of Nehemiah illustrates how God's people can partner with Him in His acts of revival.

NEHEMIAH AND REVIVAL

After Nehemiah had successfully helped the Israelites rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he turned to the rebuilding of the lives of the people themselves. As a result of being in exile for so long, the people of Israel forgot about the laws of God. They had been influenced by the culture and laws of Babylon and Persia. The reason their forefathers were taken into captivity was because they had turned their backs to God. Now on their return, their children had to revive their commitment to Yahweh as their God and Father.

There were three 'goings' into exile, three returns from exile, and three rebuildings. There was the rebuilding of the temple, the walls of Jerusalem and the spiritual lives of the people of Israel. We know that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem really began with Nehemiah turning to God in prayer when he received information on the dilapidated state of the previous wall and the disgrace it brought on God's people. Prayer also played a central role in the rebuilding of the lives of the people of Israel after their return from captivity.

Prayer and Revival (Neh. 8:1, 6; 9:1, 2; 10:29-33)

If prayer does not precede a revival, it is usually the first blessing of a revival. When God wants to do something amongst His people, He first blesses them with a commitment to extraordinary earnest prayer.

Nehemiah spontaneously engaged in fasting and prayer to seek God's intervention in reversing the humiliation the people of Israel were in because of their disobedience. *Fasting and prayer always go with revival.* It is a sure way of humbling ourselves before the Lord to declare our total dependence and trust in Him to act in particular situations. When we humble ourselves through fasting and prayer, we are declaring to God that we have no hope apart from His intervention.

We do not need to fast to get God's attention. But when we engage in proper biblical fasting, we cannot but humble ourselves before God. The real secret of fasting and prayer is that it allows us extended periods of seeking God's face and God's hand of blessing in particular situations. Fasting is not simply staying away from food. It is also the minimising of routine activities in order to spend more extended quality time with God. This includes our routine work, excessive entertainments and other routine activities that can prevent us from having extended unbroken fellowship with God. The biblical principle seems to be that when we draw near to God through prayer and fasting, He also draws near to us. (James 4: 6-10)

The other reason why prayer and fasting are important is that even though God can do anything in His sovereign power, many times He chooses to do certain extraordinary things in honour of our faith. Some spiritual victories are only won through prayer and fasting. Through our moments of fasting and prayer, God brings us to the level of faith where we see more clearly from His perspective, so we are able more precisely to ask Him to destroy strongholds and bring extraordinary victories. The discipline of fasting simply allows us to concentrate on God for extended periods of time. Whenever we do that for extended periods, in attitudes of worship and reverence, our vision of God's glory becomes clearer and weightier. Our minds and hearts are purified and we are able to exercise faith in God for the right things.

Though God answers the prayers of individual intercessors, unusual power is released when believers unite in *one accord* to beseech God's face and hand on particular issues. God visits, works with, and dwells with believers who are united in prayer.

Behind every supernatural and extraordinary move of God are people who have dedicated themselves to earnest prayer. It seems that the spirit of prayer is the first blessing of God to prepare His people for extraordinary blessings. Jim Cymbala referred to this truth in his marvelous book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*.

The history of past revivals portray this truth in full color. Whether you study the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Welsh Revival, the 1906 outpouring on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, or any other period of revival, you always find men and women who first inwardly groan, longing to see the status quo changed – in themselves and in their churches. They begin to call on God with insistence; prayer begets revival, which begets more prayer.¹

To prepare for great spiritual awakenings, we need to commit ourselves to extraordinary united praying. If revival has any link with spiritual awakening, it is a revival characterised by extraordinary united prayer. Prayer prepares the hearts of God's people for His blessings.

The Word of God and Revival (Neh. 8:1-13)

The second element that must characterise our preparation for revival is a commitment to base our lives and ministries on the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God in our lives in three areas. First, He uses the Word in our lives to convict us of our sins. Second, He uses the Word of God to help us in confessing our sins and following the ways of God. Thirdly, the Word of God provides the basis for entering into covenants with God regarding what we are repenting from, and the things we are consecrating our lives for.

a. Conviction: The Word of God is an instrument for reflecting to us not only the will of God, but also where we are in relation to God's will. When we know where we truly stand in relation to God's will, we are usually convicted by how far we are from God's

¹ Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 58.

standard. The Holy Spirit plays a direct role in bringing the sensing of conviction on us.

The first thing we learn about the role of the Word of God in rebuilding the lives of the Israelites is the attitude of the Israelites towards the Word of God. The people of Israel listened to the Word of God with attitudes of reverence. *When Ezra opened the book of the law, the people stood up* (Neh. 8:5). Ezra praised the Lord, and the people lifted their hands shouting, "Amen, Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. The people then stood up and listened to Ezra as he read the law. The people of Israel here demonstrated reverence for the Word of the Lord. They worshipped Him, and humbled themselves in God's presence as they read the Book of the Law.

This was probably due to the fact that they had lived many years without the freedom to read and live by the Book of the Law. They had an awareness of the unique place of the Word of God in a sense that we have missed in contemporary Christianity. The people of Israel did not read or listen to the Word of God casually.

This reminds me of an experience I had in Manila, Philippines, during Lausanne II in 1989. When a speaker opened the Bible and was going to read it, the Russian Christians present stood up as the Bible was read. They sat down later and listened to the speaker's exposition. For the Russian Christians, the Bible could not be read like any other book. It is the Word of God. When the Bible was being read, God was speaking to His people. It was, therefore, appropriate that when God was speaking, His people would listen with reverential attitude.

Most of the remaining participants were probably too familiar with the Bible. They had different versions at home. This 'over familiarity' can lead to the eroding of our high regard for the Word of God. The point here is not to make a sweeping claim that postures say everything. There could have been Russian Christians standing who were doing so without an inner reverence for God's Word. Equally, I believe many participants seated had tremendous reverence for the Word of God. My observation here is rather general, but the point I am making is still valid. The action of the

Russians, which most likely was a reflection of their attitude towards the Word of God, has left a powerful impression on me.

In addition to their reverential attitude, the Levites helped explain and make clear to the people the meaning of what was being read (Neh. 8:8). Having the right attitude is important to understanding God's Word. *It is also important that we have the skills to properly interpret the Word of God, so we understand its meaning.* The right attitude and the proper interpretation of God's Word prepare us for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

When we are convicted, then we are able to respond by turning to God in confession.

b. Confession: The Israelites confessed their sins based on their understanding of how they broke their part of the covenant with God. The confidence to confess and ask for forgiveness from God is also based on their understanding that God never breaks His covenant with men. Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful. God is always ready to forgive and restore us when we confess and truly repent of our sins.

The Israelites did not only confess their known sins, but also the sins of their forefathers. Their forefathers went in circles with God. When they sinned and came under God's discipline, they would confess and repent. After they were forgiven and blest by God, they would go back to their sins. In their confessions, they seem to link God's material blessings with obedience that invites blessings, and poverty and oppression to discipline from God in response to their disobedience. We seem to have lost this connection in our time. Our contemporary understanding of prosperity and progress in life is that it is due to man's achievement.

We have also lost the humility to accept the sins of our lands and forefathers. Instead of acknowledging the wrongs of our forefathers, we seek ways to justify them through theologies that are more influenced by our humanistic interests than the nature and will of God. The implication is that our repentance before God is not total and in-depth. Total repentance covers all the sins that God may be holding against a people. Our repentance seems to be more on our own terms, rather than the terms of God.

Genuine repentance is always characterised by the resolve to turn from ungodly acts to godly acts. When the Israelites confessed their sins, they renewed their covenant with God by resolving to change and live in obedience to God's law. Their resolution was serious and as such was under oath. It is nothing like our heartless confessions that are not characterised by changed lives.

The East Africa revivals started in 1929 when Dr. Joe Church (a missionary from Gahini, Rwanda) met Mr. Simeoni Nsibambi, a health worker in Kampala. These two men deplored the dryness of the church and spent time in pouring their concerns out to the Lord in prayer. They confessed their sins to one another and resolved to learn and live by the truths in God's Word. They also committed themselves to preaching the gospel to all those around them. Over a short period of time, this commitment to repentance, and obedience to God's word spread across East Africa. Those who were part of the revival had 'walking in the light' as their emphasis in every aspect of their lives. This emphasis on personal holiness soon impacted the culture. The traditional practices of witchcraft were abated. Idols were totally destroyed when people turned to God in response to the gospel. There was no excusing of idolatry on the premise of maintaining African Christian identity.

The kind of repentance that brings revival is radical. It does not compromise with sinful attitudes and actions. It would require nothing short of that kind of commitment to experience revival in our time. *We must turn from all idols to Christ. We must renounce our allegiance to the idols of ancestral spirits, materialism and the human self.* Jesus Christ must be the only Lord of our lives. We need to commit ourselves to living the Christian life on the terms of Christ based on the Word of God. This requires covenanting with God about things that we would no longer return to and things that we would now dedicate our lives for. Our lives need to be dedicated to obeying the Lord's Greatest Commandments and His Great Commission.

c. Covenanting: Nehemiah and Ezra led the Israelites to covenant with God in respect to areas of their lives that were of concern to God.

The Israelites referred to these resolutions *as a written binding agreement with the seals of the leaders*, the Levites and priests affixed to it (Neh. 9:38). The agreements or covenants of the Israelites covered three main areas. These were the areas where they themselves and their forefathers had sinned against God. *One area was no longer to give their daughters in marriage to non-Jews.* God's purpose for requiring the Israelites to set themselves apart from others and not to give their daughters in marriage to non-Jews was more religious and spiritual than ethnocentric or racist. We know this because this did not apply to non-Jews that had accepted Yahweh as their God. All those who had accepted Yahweh as their God irrespective of race were part of the Israelite community.

The main reason for commanding the Israelites not to marry people from other tribes was to prevent them from turning to other gods. The wives they would marry from other tribes would naturally influence them and cause them to turn their allegiance away from Yahweh to other gods. God's desire was to keep the Israelites away from breaking His first commandment of not worshipping other gods beside Him.

A second area of covenanting was regarding the Sabbath day. They had become rather casual with the Sabbath day. Things had degenerated to the point where they were doing business on the Sabbath. The Sabbath day was like any other day for the Israelites. The Sabbath was meant to be the day on which the Israelites were to cease their normal duties and remember the God who created the things they worked. It was the day to remember the Creator rather than to continue to be caught in the busyness with the creation.

This continues to have relevance for us. We have been invited to enter the Sabbath of the Lord. According to the writer of Hebrews, this means we cease from our own labor and give ourselves to the Lord's work. The implication here is that our career choices need to be in response to God's calling. We should no longer just work for the benefits that will accrue in our interest. We should consider our works as part of our worship. Those who live with the certainty of knowing that their works are in the centre of God's will, no

doubt they will experience a special rest in their souls. They have only one desire, that is to please the Lord in all that they do.

The Sabbath also gives us the opportunity to remember that all of creation is God's work. Humankind has been given the privilege to be stewards of God's creation as well as to enjoy it. It is for this reason that during the Sabbath, the people of God are encouraged to reflect on the needs of the poor among them. The poor who are indebted to them in some cases are relieved of the responsibility of having to pay for their debts. In essence, the Sabbath day is about turning from selfish pursuits to setting time aside to reflect on God and His purposes. It is the opportunity to rediscover our purpose and significance in life.

A third area where the people of Israel entered into a repentance covenant with God is in the area of honouring the LORD with the firstfruits of their earnings (Neh. 10:35). They will ensure that they do not neglect the house of God (Neh. 10:39). People who want to experience revival and spiritual awakening must be generous in giving to the Lord's work. This is one clear way in which we place God first in our lives. We cannot experience the supernatural grace of God in our individual lives, churches and nations unless we put God first in everything. Giving to the LORD's work is a practical demonstration of the pre-eminence of God in everything that we do.

When we have put our personal lives in order as individuals and as communities of God's people, we can pray and ask God for revival in our lives and nations.

In summary, the three areas where the Israelites entered into covenant with God in obedience to God's demands have to do with worshipping God only, and honouring God first. The avoidance of inter-ethnic marriage and the observance of the Sabbath were both meant to ensure that the Israelites worshipped God only. The main issues remained avoiding the redirection to other gods that marriage to non-Jews could cause. In the same vein, the observance of the Sabbath was supposed to help the Jews remember to give their allegiance and worship to the God of creation, rather than worship the creation. Honouring God with the first fruits of one's labour on the other hand was supposed to help the Jews

remember to put God first in all things. The blessings with the material things of this world come from God. We acknowledge this truth by giving the first fruits of everything we work for to God.

There are two tendencies that interrupt our experiencing of revival and spiritual awakening. The first challenge we face is our tendency to go back to our old ungodly ways after we have seen some initial signs of God's work in our midst. We are unable to sustain our spiritual concentration on God long enough to see deep and long lasting transformation of the situations we bring before the Lord. There is also the tendency on our part to begin to take credit for what God has done. God does not share His glory with any other person. Our two natural tendencies of spiritual relapse and the stealing of God's glory are the two enemies of sustained revival and spiritual awakening. *Revivals and spiritual awakenings are usually short lived because people turn their backs to their covenants once they get comfortable in the midst of God's blessings.*

Spiritual leaders are needed who will encourage prolonged faithfulness on the part of God's people for the special outpouring of God's blessings during revival to have deeper and more permanent effects. Nehemiah invited Ezra to help him provide the necessary leadership for the spiritual renewal and rebuilding of the people of Israel.

Leadership and Revival (Neh. 13:1ff)

In the case of the people of Israel; Nehemiah had to provide strong leadership to get them back on track with the covenants they made with God. Nehemiah had returned to Babylon after the rebuilding and dedication of the walls. In coming back to Jerusalem later, he discovered the Israelites had broken all three covenants they had made with God. The people had neglected the house of God, they were trading on the Sabbath and the men had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Nehemiah's response was firm and quite controversial. He beat some of the men and pulled out their hair when he discovered they had married non-Jewish women. He physically drove Tobiah out of a room given him by Eliashib in the house of God. He purified the priests

and Levites, and made sure they went back to their duties. The giving of offerings to the house of God was restored.

This kind of leadership is needed to sustain revival and spiritual awakening. God's people need spiritual leaders who are intolerant of ungodliness. We need leaders who are dissatisfied and angered by the ungodliness of our times. We need leaders who are bold enough to point to us how we are displeasing our Lord. In this age of tolerance, Christian leaders are generally nice people who are angered by nothing. They are accommodating of everything. The result is that we have given new names to our sins instead of calling a spade a spade. When Africans are involved in syncretism we say they are making the gospel more African. When North Americans are involved in self-worship and ungodly sensuality, we say they are simply experiencing the by-products of the value of freedom and liberty. When Europeans are demonstrating apathy and coldness to the gospel we explain it by saying they are living in a post-Christian era. I would rather call it a neo-pagan era. We need to be careful about using words that are too polished for spiritual states that should be very disturbing to us.

Who will tell us when we are displeasing God and are inviting His indignation? We need Nehemiahs for our time. The Church needs leaders who are dissatisfied enough with the status quo to call us to prayer and repentance so we can experience forgiveness and fresh visitation from God. When the Church is purified and empowered by the Holy Spirit, then we are able to see what He is doing and participate in it. That is when we are able to say with Jesus that our Father is working still and so we must also work in bringing in the harvest. A compromised Church cannot see the spiritual awakenings around her. When the Church is pure in heart, then she shall see God at work (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14).

Our repentance and pursuit of revival must seek to place Jesus Christ above everything else. The Christian life is not Jesus plus, it is Jesus period. The church needs a rededication to the sufficiency of God's Word for all matters relating to life and godliness. Secondly, the church needs to return to the truth that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. He is the only Saviour.

Revival is not simply a return to a past experience of God's blessings, but a return to the Person, Purpose and Power of Jesus Christ. For instance, the American church's pursuit of revival must acknowledge that as much as the founding of the country was based on Christian principles, it was not Christian enough to be a canonised experience that will be the current aspiration in regards to revival. Revival in Europe must not only be a return to the times of Wesley, Muller, Whitefield, etc. We must seek a higher standard that is based on the nature and revealed will of Christ. The ways of Christ are always higher than our past experiences. Our aspirations for revival do not always impress our Lord because they do not go beyond past experiences to capture the higher will and nature of Christ. Let us trust God for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit on His people everywhere.

We need to claim His promise through the prophet Isaiah.

"Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:18)

We have compromised and as such become complacent. We need a wake up call from God. Given our human nature, God sometimes has no other option but that of taking the things that have become idols in our lives away from us. Persecution becomes an inevitable instrument of God to wake His people up from their complacency and indifference. This is not to imply that every suffering is caused by God to wake His people up from spiritual slumber. However, at times that is clearly the case. At times in human history, we are confronted with the paradox of persecution bringing untold suffering on a people, and yet at the same time bringing open doors that are unprecedented.

Suffering as an Instrument of Revival

History is filled with examples of persecution bringing sufferings on a people and yet at the same time giving them unusual opportunities to accelerate the evangelisation of nations. The persecution and the scattering of the early church that is partly

reported in Acts 8 facilitated the spreading of the gospel among the Gentile nations.

A contemporary case is the effects of the AIDS epidemic in Africa and other countries in the world. It is a very serious disaster that requires all the attention we can give to eliminating it from human experience. Yet at the same time, it has confronted us with the effects of our ungodly lifestyle. The governments of many countries are opening their public schools to the teaching of ethics, morality and in many cases Christian living. This is an unusual development. Many Christian organisations are now involved in responding to the AIDS epidemic in public institutions at the invitation of governments.

In Malawi, for instance, the government has opened the door to all the three million youth in the nation's primary and secondary schools to be trained in Christian ethics and morality. The same situation exists in many other African countries. We have open doors right now to help build a Christian foundation for many of these countries by teaching the youth the Way of Christ. This is one of the few times in history that governments are openly inviting the Church to help provide the answer for a national need.

It, however, needs to be stated that God does not need our human suffering as an instrument for revival. God does not need evil to do good things among His people. God, however, demonstrates goodness to His people in spite of evil. The point being made is that God's ability to use human suffering as an instrument for revival should not be mistaken to mean that He needs human suffering as an instrument for revival. It is rather characteristic of humans that suffering helps us put the brevity of this life in perspective, and as a result be more open to things that are spiritual and eternal.

For the Church to help society with such problems and also make the most of the accompanying opportunities to proclaim the gospel of Christ, she has to cease being part of the problem. We need to pray for God's fire of purification to fall on the Church afresh. Only a revived Church can make the most of the open doors that result from spiritual awakening. Spiritual awakening occurs when

society as a whole acknowledges the need for God's intervention in human affairs.

Results of Revival

When the Church is revived, there will be:

- Repentance on the part of the believers,
- Renewal in the lives of believers,
- Reconciliation among believers, and
- Reformation in society.

A notable example of the results of revival is in war torn Rwanda. Emmanuel was given a copy of Dr. Bright's book on revival, *The Coming Revival*. When he read the book, he knew that the revival being referred to by Dr. Bright was also needed in Rwanda to bring healing and reconciliation to a land that is being destroyed by ethnic hatred. He shared the book with some Pastors. Tutsi and Hutu church leaders decided to fast and pray for 40 days to seek God's face for revival, reconciliation and healing for Rwanda. Many church leaders and their members joined in the 40-day fast. The Christians who were part of this were convicted of their sins of ethnic hatred against one another. They confessed their sins to one another, and also forgave one another. The process of reconciliation and healing between Tutsi and Hutu Christians began. This is a great testimony to the non-Christian community on the power of the gospel and the relevance of the Christian faith to the challenges facing Rwanda as a country.

It all began with Emmanuel's decision to take the initiative to encourage his fellow Rwandese Christian leaders to join in fasting and praying for revival, reconciliation and healing for their land.

A revived Church becomes a beam of light in society. When the Church is revived and is right with God, she can bring transformation to many areas of society as a whole. Revival, therefore, leads to social and moral reformation. The reformation is possible because of the many who come to know the Lord as a result of the faithfulness of the revived in preaching the gospel of Christ. Reformation, however, requires the willingness of Christians to impact society through involvement. The East Africa

revivals resulted in improvements in agriculture, education and health. This was because the leaders of the revival emphasised Christian stewardship in these areas. However, the revivals failed to make a direct impact on politics. It was the belief of many of the pioneer revivalists that Christians could not be involved in politics because they were not of this world. Christians can only be salt and light of the world through involvement.

When spiritual awakening occurs, there is usually an accompanying great response on the part of non-believers to the gospel message. We do need the grace of spiritual awakening around the world today, but more particularly in parts of the world that seem to be closed to the gospel. Some of these areas are Europe and Japan. We need to join in praying together to trust God to open peoples' hearts to the gospel in these parts of the world.

EVANGELISM AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

God is Always Doing the Supernatural in Evangelism (Jn. 5:17).

Our Lord Jesus, when questioned by the Jews about healing the invalid at Bethesda on the Sabbath, said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn 5:17). By this statement Jesus was underscoring the important truth that God is always at work. Especially in the area of evangelism, God is always at work preparing hearts for the gospel. We should learn to maximise the opportunities we have to reach people for Christ, even as we pray for more open doors.

In his prison letter to the church at Colosse, the apostle Paul asked Christians to pray that a door would open for him to proclaim the gospel of Christ clearly (Col. 4:3). This example of Paul suggests to us that we need to pray for doors to open for the proclamation of the gospel. It is our responsibility as believers to pray for spiritual awakening so that doors would be opened for the gospel in unusual ways.

Our expectation for and prayer for spiritual awakening should not mistakenly cause us to take lightly the open doors that we have now. The Spirit of God is at work and has prepared many hearts

for the gospel. Our responsibility is prayerfully to see where God is at work and join Him in making the most of the opportunities.

We Need to have our Spiritual Eyes Opened so We can Discern what God is Doing, and What God Wants to Do Through Us (Eph. 1:17,18)

“The LORD will reveal what He is doing to those who fear Him” (Ps. 25:14). When we experience personal revival and are walking closely with the Lord, He is willing to confide in us what He is doing in our world. We have the example of Elisha and his servant at Dothan. When the Israelites were surrounded by the Arameans, the servant of Elisha lost all hope when he compared the size of the Aramean army to the number of Israelites who were surrounded by the Arameans. The servant of Elisha could not see the angels and chariots of the Lord that surrounded the Arameans. Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes would be opened. When this happened, Elisha’s servant confessed that those who were for them were more than those who were against them (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Revival in the Church opens the eyes of Christians to see what God is doing. The responsibility of the Church is to walk in holiness before the Lord. Holiness, as a result of revival and spiritual renewal, is a prerequisite for discerning what God is doing (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14).

God chooses those who understand the times and know what should be done to maximise the opportunities as His instruments for extraordinary harvests. The hand of the LORD will be on those He chooses to anoint for special tasks related to evangelism.

Once We Understand What God is Doing, We Need to Seek Obediently, Creative and Effective Ways to Partner with Him in Evangelism (Jn 5:19).

In partnering with God in evangelism, we need to *seize* every opportunity (Eph. 5: 15,16). *Open doors have a life-span*. They do not remain open forever. This is the reason why we need to make the most of them while it is still day. For the night comes when we may no longer walk through those doors as easily as we can today.

A good example is the opening of the former Soviet Union to the gospel towards the end of the 20th century. As the year 1987 approached, some Christians in Russia felt strongly that they should pray for the release of Christians from captivity to communism. There was an urgent call to prayer that brought Christians all over the world before the throne of God, petitioning God for one thing: religious freedom in the former Soviet Union. The conviction that underlying this call to prayer was that just as the Jews were liberated from captivity to Babylon after 70 years, God would also bring liberation to the Christians in the former Soviet Union after 70 years of captivity to communism (1917-1987). God answered this prayer and as a result the former Soviet Union opened up to Christian missions. Many Christian organisations joined in partnerships to make the most of this opportunity. Now there are already some restrictions to this open door to evangelism.

Challenges to Maximising Opportunities for Evangelism

The practical challenge we face today with the unfinished task is not only that of getting God to act and open doors for evangelism. It is also that of asking God for boldness to step out in obedience to maximise the opportunities we have because of doors that God has already opened for us. The Lord Jesus said that those who love Him will obey Him. He promised to love and reveal Himself to those who obey Him (John 14: 21,23). Those who obey God are the ones who will know what the Father is doing and be able to participate in it. Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ. As we abide in Christ's love and obey His commands we are also in Christ who is in God the Father. It is amazing that those who are already indwelt by the Spirit of God and are living their lives in obedience to Christ's commands have God the Father and God the Son making their home with them.

Christ promises that such obedient Christians can ask whatever they wish and it will be granted. We have the Messianic prophecy of David to guide us in knowing what is probably the most important 'ask' before God. The Father told the Son, "ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth

your possession" (Ps. 2:8). *We know we are in the will of God when we ask Him for the nations.* Our preoccupation should be the taking of every land for Christ Jesus. We are to work obediently in partnership with the Spirit of God in taking every thought in every land captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

If we are honest, we will agree that a major part of our real challenge is that many of the opened doors are in areas of the world that are not convenient mission fields. There are prices to pay to bring the gospel to these parts of the world. We should, therefore, ask ourselves whether we are really waiting for God to open doors to the gospel, or for Him to make the mission field convenient and safe. We have not been called to seek the sensation of the spectacular, but to simply live in wholehearted obedience to God through His Word. Our goal should be to have the Presence and Power of God go with us as we preach the good news. He has promised to be with us always until the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

A good case in point is the situation in southern Sudan. The Christians and traditional African Religionists have refused to give in to Islam and the *sharia* law. They have had to risk their lives to the point of being literally deprived of the basics of life. Women who are weakened by starvation are being sold as slaves. Churches, schools and hospitals are being bombed by government forces. In spite of all this, most southern Sudanese would rather have Jesus than be ruled under '*sharia* law'.

The response of the worldwide Christian community to the fate of the southern Sudanese has not been encouraging. Are the doors not open in southern Sudan? Are we not really waiting for things to become safe in southern Sudan before we go? The Church was founded on the blood of the martyrs. There is no reason to assume that it would not require the same sacrifices for its on-going building.

The doors are open in Eastern Europe, Russia, China, Western Europe, Latin America and Africa. Even in the Middle East we are seeing remarkable moves by the Spirit of God. Through radio and television broadcasts many people in this region are hearing the good news of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Many who make

decisions for Christ are followed up by correspondence. It is reported that in one such Correspondence Centre alone there are 3,000 letters received each day from people who are inquiring about Jesus Christ. This response is so remarkable that it takes special trucks collecting the sacks with mail each day.

We have seen remarkable progress in world evangelisation in the 20th century. In the year 1910 there were less than 10 million known Christians on the continent of Africa. Towards the end of the 20th century there are about 350 to 400 million Africans who claim to be Christians. Yet at the same time there are about 150 to 200 million Africans who have not clearly heard the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. My heart was warmed with a report I received regarding a partnership between the Nazarene Church and Campus Crusade for Christ in Africa. This partnership was based on the usage of the Jesus Film for evangelism and church planting. Campus Crusade provided the equipment and the training of workers, whilst the Nazarene Church provided the manpower and supervision. Within two years, there were 300 new churches planted in Africa with about 175,000 people in follow-up programmes. The Nazarene Church is planning to plant 12,000 churches by 2010 A. D. God is definitely at work right now around our world.

We need to pray that within the next two decades we can truly say that we have given everyone on planet earth multiple opportunities to respond to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our task is not to seek the spectacular, but to be sure we are obediently taking the good news of Christ to all people in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we do this, God in His sovereignty will confirm the message with special evidences of His Presence and Power in ways that we will refer to as spiritual awakening.

To make the most of the opportunities available to us today we need to enter into partnerships that will maximise the resources God has given to us. The tendency for many of us to go it alone or to feel obliged to directly use the resources we have, instead of making them available to others who can be more effective is a great limitation to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The

Church today has more than enough financial, human and material resources for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

What is needed is for all of God's people to use all of God's resources to reach all of God's world. Our God is at work. We should be sure we are abiding in Christ who is in the Father. Then we will have the spiritual insight to know what God is doing and how we can partner with Him in reaching our world with the gospel.

Let us together pray and trust God for a fresh anointing on His Church so that the revival and spiritual awakening that we will experience in the early part of the 21st century, if not before the end of the 20th century, will be like nothing we have ever seen. We pray that God will do a new thing.

Even so Come Spirit Come !!!

TOWARD SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF THE UNEVANGELISED

Christopher Little

One of the perplexing problems which faces theologians is the eternal fate of those who have never heard the gospel. Believing that salvation necessitates the knowledge of the gospel, missionaries have laboured and died in foreign lands to bring the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to them. However, this certainty of the unevangelised being lost has fallen on hard times, even within evangelical circles.

In this article Christopher Little finds no hope of salvation through General Revelation. But he seeks to "solve the problem of the unevangelised" by finding possibilities of Special Revelation being granted to them. Following this article by Little, Keith Ferdinando offers a response.

One of the most difficult theological questions ever considered by the human mind has to be: what happens to those who never have an opportunity to hear about the saving gospel of Jesus Christ? Are they part of the elect without knowing it, are they condemned through no fault of their own, or, should they be considered as within the redemptive activity of our sovereign God?

In approaching this formidable topic, scholars have become trenched in one of three different camps. In very simplistic terms, Mr. Christopher Little has served with three different mission agencies on three different continents. Presently, he is the Director of the International Ministries of World Mission Associates. He has earned a BS from the University of Southern California, an MDiv from Talbot Theological Seminary, a ThM from Fuller Theological Seminary and is now pursuing a PhD at Fuller Theological Seminary.

the *pluralist* believes that most ways, if not all, lead to God; the *inclusivist* affirms that several ways, primarily those among the world religions, lead to God; and the *particularist* contends that there is only one way to God, through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this article will not be to comment on the pros and cons of each these positions,¹ but rather, to add food for thought to this on-going discussion by attempting to construct a well-informed soteriological missiology. To do so, I will endeavor to re-examine the character of general revelation, trace the historical nature of special revelation, and lastly, offer various modalities of special revelation by which God is capable of working redemptively among the unevangelised.

RE-EXAMINING GENERAL REVELATION

General revelation is God's universal communication of Himself through nature, human conscience, and history. Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:20 establish the fact that God continuously discloses His "glory," "eternal power" and "divine nature" (NASB) through creation to humankind. The question is however, are people, specifically the unevangelised, responding positively to God in this way?

It is doubtful. As Calvin pointed out, the psalmist possessed the *spectacles* of special revelation (Ps. 19:7-14) through which he was able to discern what God was revealing of Himself through "the heavens." In addition, the Apostle Paul leaves very little room for debate on the subject. According to him, "men," that is, collective humanity, continually "suppress the truth" about God which is "understood through what has been made" and this results in being "without excuse" before God (Rom. 1:18, 20).

¹ For those interested in an evaluation of these positions plus the presentation of a fourth, the evangelist paradigm, see Charles Van Engen, "The Uniqueness of Christ in Mission Theology" in *Christianity and the Religions: A Biblical Theology of World Religions*, Edward Rommen & Harold Netlands, eds. (Baker, 1995), 183-217.

When it comes to human conscience, it is commonly believed that Romans 2:14-16 provides the basis for Gentiles potentially and very innately cultivating a relationship with God through “the Law written in their hearts.” But there are two serious problems with this view: first, the idea that individuals come to know God through the works of the Law is contrary to biblical thought (cf., Rom. 3:20); and second, the witness of the Gentile conscience in this passage takes place not in the course of this life but in the final judgement (Rom. 2:16).

But then, who are these “doers of the Law”? (v. 13). There are only two other options: either they are hypothetical Gentiles or Gentile Christians. While the correct view is open to debate,² the only conclusive thing that can be said is that this passage makes no reference to Gentiles, apart from Christ, seeking and obeying God through their consciences. If one wants to make a case for that, then an appeal to Romans 1:19 must be made where it says, “that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.” A. T. Robertson translates the phrase “evident within them” as “in their hearts and consciences.”³ Yet this still does not prove productive since, as the context shows, the same repulsion of divine truth that takes place in relation to nature also occurs within the context of human conscience.

Some find this difficult to swallow and turn to the illumination of the *Logos* for support of a divine, inner enlightenment of all individuals. For example, John Sanders states, “Jesus is the light that came into the world and enlightens every person (John 1:9). Not all respond positively to this light – it is not irresistible – but every person experiences the illumination of the *Logos* to one

² Douglas Moo argues for the former interpretation, “Romans 2: Saved Apart from the Gospel?” in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, William Crockett and James Sigountos, eds. (Baker, 1993:142-145), but C. E. B. Cranfield reasons very convincingly for the latter in *The International Critical Commentary. The Epistle to the Romans* (T. & T. Clark, 1980), Vol. 1, 156-161.

³ *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Baker, 1931), Vol. 4, 328.

degree or another.”⁴ But as some respected commentators have pointed out,⁵ the activity of the *Logos* here is inseparably connected to the Incarnation event in John’s prologue. While commenting on the light which “enlightens [Gr. *photizei*] every man”, D. A. Carson provides some lexical information which enables one to correctly interpret the passage:

(1) The verb *photizei* may mean ‘to illuminate (inwardly)’, i.e. ‘to give knowledge’. Though lexically secondary, this meaning is common . . . in the New Testament (e.g. Eph. 1:18). . . . (2) The verb *photizei* may have its primary lexical meaning ‘to shed light upon’, i.e. ‘to make visible’, ‘to bring to light’. Inner illumination is then not in view (whether of general revelation or of the special light that attends salvation). What is at stake, rather, is the objective revelation, the ‘light’, that comes into the world with the incarnation of the Word, the invasion of the ‘true light’. It shines on every man, and divides the race: those who hate the light respond as the world does (1:10); they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21).⁶

The book of Acts has much to say on God’s self-disclosure in the course of human history. Concerning the Apostles’ experience at Lystra, Clark Pinnock has written: “To the people of Lystra he [Luke] quotes Paul as saying that ‘He [God] did not leave himself without witness’ (Acts 14:17). Apparently these people possessed truth from God in the context of their religion and culture, and Luke does not hesitate to acknowledge it.”⁷ Yet this conclusion is unwarranted simply because it cannot be supported by the text. The

⁴ *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelised* (InterVarsity Press, 1992), 217.

⁵ See William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary – The Gospel of John* (Baker, 1988:77-79), and D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), 118-125.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷ “The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions” in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World*, Mark Noll & David Well, eds. (Eerdmans, 1988), 158.

people of Lystra, instead of heeding God's "witness" in the form of graciously providing "rains from heaven and fruitful seasons," became idol-worshippers and tried to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas in response to the healing of a crippled man (vv. 11-13). Even after they attempted to rectify the situation they had a hard time restraining "the crowds from offering sacrifice to them" (v. 18).

Another important Acts passage is the Areopagus discourse (17:22-31). Don Richardson, well-known for his redemptive analogies, believes that the alter to the "UNKNOWN GOD" represented the true God which the Athenians worshipped, but in ignorance.⁸ Others take exception to this view.⁹ For example, George Ladd writes, "In their religious zeal, the Athenians did not wish to omit from worship any deity with whom they might not be acquainted. Paul states that there was indeed one whom they did not know, and this one he declared to them."¹⁰ In attempting to understand the meaning of this passage, it might be helpful to point out that in v. 23 both the word "UNKNOWN" and the word "ignorance" come from the same Greek root word. Hence, there is evidently a play on words here. The substantive "ignorance" comes from a verb meaning "to be ignorant, not to know." It occurs in the present active participial form and therefore signifies that, according to Paul, the Athenians were continually worshipping without knowledge, that is, in ignorance. Thus, if we take the plain sense of Paul's words, what he is doing is informing the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who prided themselves on their ability to ascertain true knowledge, that this "UNKNOWN GOD" is unknown to them precisely because their worship of Him is being

⁸ *Eternity In Their Hearts Revised* (Regal Books, 1986), 21-22.

⁹ The fundamental problem with Richardson's position and his views on the efficacy of general revelation have been rightly criticized by Bruce Demarest and Richard Harpel, "Don Richardson's 'Redemptive Analogies' and the Biblical Idea of Revelation" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 146(583), and by Arthur Glasser, "Old Testament Contextualization: Revelation and Its Environment" in *The WORD Among Us*, Dean Gilliland, ed. (Word Books, 1989), 38.

¹⁰ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Moody Press, 1962), 1157.

done without knowledge or in ignorance of Him. Obviously, one cannot truly worship God unless He first be known (cf., Jn. 4:23).

There are two other important statements in this discourse worthy of note. First, the phrase “if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him” (v. 27), is sometimes taken to mean that individuals and/or communities have actually found God on their own. But it must be pointed out that the two verbs “groped” and “find” are in the optative mood of the Greek language, which is one step farther removed from reality than the subjunctive. God revealed Himself through creation and history so that individuals would “groped for” and “find Him,” but there is no guarantee that they would since the mood implies that it is only a possibility, not an actuality. And as this passage shows, the Athenians disregarded this heavenly message and turned away from the true God and toward worshipping idols. Second, the phrase “having overlooked the times of ignorance” (v. 30), likewise needs clarification (cf. Acts 14:16). Does it indicate that God did not hold culpable the Gentile nations until the coming of Christ? As John Piper demonstrates, it appears not:

The ‘times of ignorance’ in Paul’s sermon correspond to the ages in which the ‘mystery of Christ has been kept secret’ (Romans 16:25; Colossians 1:26; Ephesians 3:5). . . . God’s overlooking the ‘times of ignorance’ does not mean that he ignores sins so as not to punish them. This would contradict Romans 1:18 . . . and Romans 2:12 But ‘now’ –a key word in the turning of God’s historic work of redemption–something new has happened. The Son of God has appeared. . . . This turn in redemptive history is for the glory of Christ. Its aim is to put Him at the center of all God’s saving work.¹¹

In the final analysis, the idea that general revelation, whatever that information might be, provides hope for the unevangelised encountering salvation before God is unfounded, since humanity continuously responds negatively which results in condemnation. This may sound a bit unfair on God’s part because why should we

¹¹ *Let The Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Baker, 1995), 136, 140.

be held guilty for something which we never asked for in the first place? The following illustration may help. Suppose a wood shop teacher offers a hammer to one of his or her students in order to assist in a class project. If the student refuses to accept the hammer and chooses to work with his or her own hands instead, then the teacher should not be held guilty for a failing grade given to the student due to the poor quality of work. Similarly, when God offers knowledge of Himself through general revelation, He should not be considered unjust when humankind rejects it. For the student to blame his or her shop instructor for the mess he or she has made as a result of rejecting the hammer makes about as much sense as humankind accusing God for the inexcusable state it finds itself in as a result of rejecting His goodness.

TRACING SPECIAL REVELATION

At this point it is imperative to remember that “God has shut up all in disobedience that He may show mercy to all” (Rom. 11:32). One way in which He shows mercy to all is by providing special revelation. Special revelation is God’s communication of Himself at specific times in specific ways with specific truths in order to reconcile specific individuals and/or communities with Himself. I would like to now discuss some of the more important events and individuals surrounding the disclosure of special revelation.

Because of God’s unfailing love, immediately after the fall He sought to restore fellowship between Himself and our first parents through the *protoevangelium*. This first gospel states that the woman’s seed shall bruise the head of the serpent’s seed, while the serpent’s seed shall bruise the heel of the woman’s seed (Gen. 3:15). But how much of this prophecy did Adam and Eve comprehend? More than meets the eye. The word “bruise” can also carry the connotation of “to crush or strike at” and the word “seed” can signify “offspring.” When they named their first son “Cain” which means “spear”, it seems pretty clear that they believed he would be the one to strike at the head of the serpent. When they named their second son “Abel” which denotes “futility”, it likely demonstrates that they were confused about the

significance of his birth since their first son already met the requirement. Although we know that they were ultimately wrong about their understanding of the "seed" which is Christ Himself (cf., Gal. 3:16; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8), all that needs to be emphasized here is that there was a definite faith response to special revelation manifested in their actions:

Continuing down the line of redemptive history, it is uncertain whether or not Lamech in naming his son "Noah" meaning "rest", actually believed along with his contemporaries that he would fulfill the prophecy concerning the seed of the woman. However, the connection made between Noah and his ancestors through the godly line of Seth provides support for the opinion that Noah heard about the special revelation passed on by Adam and Eve through oral tradition, believed it, and like Enosh and Enoch, developed a relationship with God (see the genealogy in Gen. 5).

After the flood, God again gave special revelation to humanity in the form of the Noachic covenant (Gen. 9:1-17). There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that the flood tradition was widely known in numerous ancient societies.¹² How much of the information contained in the Noachic covenant was accurately transmitted to these societies, through which they could have established a relationship with God, is debatable. On the one hand, the Tower of Babel incident casts much doubt on the idea, but on the other hand, the life of one particular individual argues for a more likely possibility.

That individual is Abraham, a Chaldean. Why did God choose him among all the people of the earth to be at the centre of His next redemptive stage? I propose that He did so because of Abraham's positive response to the special revelatory truth contained in the Noachic covenant. The fact that Abraham had open access to this information is based upon his family lineage (cf., Gen. 11:10-26). He could have easily heard the message of the Noachic covenant, either directly or indirectly from Shem and others (according to one's view on genealogical gaps), and incorporated it into his life

¹² For example, see Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Zondervan, 1982), 82.

by following its precepts thereby manifesting his faith (cf., Jam. 2:22). As Roland Harrison puts it: "the deliberate choice of God by each successive generation of patriarchs represents an extremely ancient religious concept that is thoroughly consistent with the Biblical tradition. . . . It was to such a deity that the clan members, following the lead of the patriarchal head, gave supreme if perhaps not always complete devotion."¹³

Yet, for this perspective to be valid it must be reconciled first with the fact that Abraham's family "served other gods" (Jos. 24:2), and second, with God's declaration of Abraham's justification only after he sojourned in the promised land (Gen. 15:6). Concerning the first point, the verse does not say that Abraham himself served other gods, only his "fathers." In addition, Leon Wood states: "it may be that Terah earlier in life had given allegiance to . . . other deities as well as Yahweh, but later changed. He may never have arisen to Abraham's monotheistic belief, but at least he had come to a place where he had introduced his son to the worship of Yahweh and been willing to respond to Abraham's urging to leave Ur when Yahweh called."¹⁴ Hence, I deduce that because Terah left Ur with Abraham to make the long journey to Canaan, he and other members of Abraham's family, at least Nahor and Lot, were converted to Yahweh through Abraham's testimony (cf., Gen. 31:53; 2 Pe. 2:7). This conclusion is further substantiated by Genesis 11:31 which states that "Terah took Abram his son," thus indicating that Terah himself led the expedition to Canaan, but because of health problems and old age, was only able to make it as far as Haran.

Secondly, on the question of just when Abraham came to faith in God, Walter Kaiser Jr. makes the following comment on Genesis 15:6:

We will answer that it was not the first he believed, but it is the first time that the Scriptures expressly mention his faith. It is appropriate to bring out his faith at this point because of the prominence that the text has now given to what has been there all along (since the ancient

¹³ *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1988), 397.

¹⁴ *A Survey of Israel's History* (Zondervan, 1970), 45-46.

promise made to Eve) – the promise of the ‘seed’ – but is only made explicit by the newly raised problem of the lack of an heir to be the Seed that was promised. Thus, the passage connects the Seed . . . as the object of Abraham’s belief.¹⁵

This indicates that God’s involvement in Abraham’s life depicts a process in which his faith was conceived in Ur and nurtured throughout his life as he faithfully responded to special revelation (cf., Acts 7:2; Gen. 12:1; 12:7; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 21:12; 22:1).

One of Abraham’s contemporaries, Melchizedek, king of Salem, often comes up in the debate concerning the unevangelised. How is it that both he and Abraham employed the exact same title, “El Elyon” for God (Gen. 14:20, 22)? Is it necessary to assume, as some do, that he must have responded positively to general revelation and come to know God in this way?¹⁶ Gleason Archer points one in the right direction when he states: “Obviously Melchizedek was a true believer, who had remained faithful to the worship of the one true God (just like . . . Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law . . .). The testimony of Noah and his sons had evidently been maintained in other parts of the Middle East besides Ur and Haran.”¹⁷ Hence, Melchizedek appears to have come to faith in God, including no doubt many others, in the same way that Abraham did: through believing and adhering to the special revelatory truth contained in the Noahic covenant.

Although it may be difficult to chronologically place the life of Job within the context of redemptive history, a discussion of this nature would not be complete without mentioning him. The most intriguing thing about the man called Job is that he already had a well-developed theology concerning the Redeemer and the resurrection of the dead before these concepts were fully revealed in the New Testament (Job 19:25-26). The key to understanding how he could have come to hold to such beliefs may lie in the mindset of the author as presented through the words of Elihu, the wisest of

¹⁵ *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1991), 127.

¹⁶ For this point of view, see Richardson, p. 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

Job's friends (Job 33:13-33). While speaking to Job, he states that God speaks directly to people through dreams (vv. 14-15), visions (vv. 14-15), and angels (vv. 23-24). Two important points in the narrative need to be emphasised. First, after the mediatorial work of an angel is described whereby he reminds "a man what is right for him" (v. 23), the statement comes, "Then he [the individual] will pray to God, and He will accept him, That he may see His face with joy, And He may restore His righteousness to man" (v. 26). The result of this is that the individual is able to say, "I have sinned and perverted what is right, And it is not proper for me. He [God] has redeemed my soul from going to the pit, And my life shall see the light" (vv. 27-28). And second, Elihu asserts, "Behold, God does all these oftentimes with men, To bring back his soul from the pit, That he may be enlightened with the light of life" (vv. 29-30). That "Indeed God speaks once, Or twice, *yet* no one notices it" (v. 14) should not be interpreted that no one ever responds to God in this way, because we have an example in the same passage of an individual who does.

At the very least, what we have here is a phenomenological treatise presented through poetry concerning how God works redemptively "oftentimes" through the modality of a dream, a vision, and/or an angel. Furthermore, the life of Job is offered as a real life example in order to substantiate this position. God speaks to Job not once (38:1-40:1) but twice (40:6-41:34), and Job replies both times (40:3-5; 42:1-6). Nothing in the text indicates that Job found this mode of communication with God either surprising or unusual. The content of God's message, not the medium, is accented. Hence, is the author trying to disclose to us that Job had such experiences with God throughout his life? And is it possible that through these incidents God revealed to Job special revelatory truth whereby he came to believe in his Redeemer and in his resurrection from the dead? Whatever the case may be, the soteriological implications of this passage as it pertains to the state of the unevangelised are astounding, and therefore, worthy of much consideration.

Moving on to the New Testament, another figure that has relevance to our discussion is Cornelius, the Roman centurion. The

key to understanding this God-fearer is to realise that there are two simultaneous and very significant movements occurring in the book of Acts. One is the movement progressively outward on the part of the Church while the other is the movement progressively Godward on the part of individuals and/or communities. These two movements intersect as each is brought to fulfillment throughout the narrative.

The Apostle Peter's encounter with Cornelius plainly illustrates this. Through the vision on the roof of Simon's house (Acts 10:9-16), Peter is brought to a paradigmatic shift in his theology which leads to a change in his missiological practice. Then, as a result of Peter's testimony about his experience to the church in Jerusalem, Gentiles were welcomed into the Church since "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life*" (11:18). But even before Peter visited the house of a Gentile, Cornelius was already moving toward God. This can hardly be disputed because before God ever sent Peter, he dispatched an angel to converse with Cornelius in response to his almsgiving and prayers (10:3-6). Does this mean that Cornelius was saved before Peter arrived and the Holy Spirit fell? Apparently not because the angel informed Cornelius that Peter "shall speak words by which" he would be saved (11:14). It almost goes without saying, but all involved in missions today should be looking for the "Cornelius" of God," in order to be as effective as possible in their particular contexts of ministry.

Each of these events shows how God has chosen throughout redemptive history to deal with individuals and/or communities solely on the basis of and response to special revelation, and as such, any well-informed soteriological missiology will necessarily take this into account. After having laid the preceding foundation, I am now prepared to discuss the modalities of special revelation through which God continues to reveal Himself in our world today.

MODALITIES OF SPECIAL REVELATION

Although I have shut the door of salvation regarding general revelation, I now want to prop it wide open in relation to God

working redemptively through the modalities of special revelation among the unevangelised. In reality, there is great hope for the unevangelised because they never have existed, exist, or will exist, without the possibility of finding and knowing God. The Lord of the universe, in His sovereignty and goodness, has provided various means by which to initiate, direct, sustain, and fulfill a salvific relationship with Himself on behalf of whosoever will. These means are the modalities, as defined below, which are employed by Him in order to communicate His special revelatory truth.¹⁸

1. Oral Tradition

Rahab heard by word of mouth that the God of the Israelites had delivered them from the Egyptians and the Amorites, and as a consequence, put her trust in the Lord (Jos. 2:10-11). Moreover, Luke states that “devout men, from every nation under heaven” were present on the day of Pentecost when Peter stood up and preached the gospel (Acts 2:5). How much of this message was later handed down to successive generations among the various nations represented is unknown, but the possibility does exist.

2. Miraculous events

On the road to Damascus, the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to Saul which directly led to his conversion and call (Acts. 9:1-22). This experience combined with the fact that he later received in Arabia the gospel of grace “not from man, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12), proves that God is not limited to human agency when communicating the gospel to people. In the annals of church history, we learn that the Emperor Constantine, while praying, saw in the heavens a cross of light bearing the inscription “Conquer by this.” His appropriation of this event contributed to the establishment of Christianity in the Roman empire.

¹⁸ For a similar outline, see Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor Books, 1986), :63-65.

3. Dreams

God came to Abimelech in “a dream of the night” and informed him that he was “a dead man” because of taking Abraham’s wife, Sarah (Gen. 20:3). Also, God warned the magi “in a dream not to return to Herod” and thereafter returned home by another route (Mt. 2:12). For an extra-biblical example of this modality, the story is told of “Adiri . . . of Dutch Guiana . . . a heathen and a fetish worshipper. He was convicted of sin and apparently converted through dreams and visions. Heaven and hell were revealed to him. He was sick unto death, and One appeared to him declaring himself to be the Mediator between God and man, and telling him to go to the missionaries for instruction. He was persecuted, but he won his tribe from heathenism and transformed them into a Christian community.”¹⁹

4. Visions

The word of the LORD came to Abram “in a vision” (Gen. 15:1). King Nebuchadnezzar was told by Daniel that God was speaking to him through visions in his mind while on his bed (Dan. 2:28). This is significant in understanding the king’s spiritual progress as he eventually came to faith in Daniel’s God (Dan. 4:34-37). And, as we have already seen, Cornelius saw “in a vision an angel” sent by God (Acts 10:1-6). On the contemporary scene, Dudley Woodberry, after surveying 100 Muslim converts, states that “Over one-half of these believers have had at least one (dream or vision) before or after conversion.”²⁰

5. Angels

An angel proclaimed the gospel to the shepherds at the time of Jesus’ birth (Lk. 2:10-11). At the end of the age, an angel will preach the “eternal gospel” to all the inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 14:6). This is the primary reason why the view which holds that

¹⁹ Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Pickering & Inglis Limited, 1962), Vol. 3, 844.

²⁰ “Dreams of Christ awakening Muslims to newfound faith” in *World Pulse* (March, 1995), 4.

the Church must reach the world with the gospel before Jesus Christ can return is mistaken. The entire world will hear the gospel before Christ returns in fulfillment of Mt. 24:14, but this may very well be accomplished through an angel rather than the Church.

6. Human messengers.

Jonah's preaching led to the repentance of the Ninevites (Jonah 3), John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of the Lord (Mt. 3:1-3), and Stephen paid with his life for boldly proclaiming God's word (Acts 7). This modality is being utilized by God every time a person opens his or her mouth and delivers special revelation to those who are in need of hearing it.

7. The written Word of God

The Bible provides the only objective basis by which to evaluate the information that comes through the other modalities. Obviously, if after doing our homework, a message delivered by any of the other modalities does not conform to the teaching of Scripture, it must be rejected.

By way of conclusion, several things need to be clarified. First, we must recognise that God is not limited either by the activity of the Church or the spread of the Bible to accomplish His redemptive purposes in history. Just as He employed the modalities of special revelation throughout redemptive history as recorded in Scripture, He is able to utilise them today in view of His desire to call a people unto Himself (Rev. 5:9). As Alister McGrath explains, "God's saving work must never be exclusively restricted to human preaching, as if the Holy Spirit was silent or inactive in God's world, or as if the actualisation of God's saving purposes depended totally on human agencies. The Creator is not dependent on his creation in achieving his purposes."²¹ Hence, we are not as important as we sometimes like to think we are.

²¹ *More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Dennis Okholm & Timothy Phillips, eds. (1995), 179.

Some may be wondering, didn't Paul say "how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14)? In answering that question, it is hard to believe that Paul would have agreed with the idea that God has restricted the gospel witness to human preachers alone since he himself was reached and transformed through other means. The context of this passage shows that Paul is simply highlighting our human responsibility as Christ's ambassadors, nothing more and nothing less. In addition, it is important to realise that the various modalities do not work in opposition or contradiction to each other but rather complement and support one another as part of God's grand orchestra of redemption (e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch, the written word of God, and Philip (Acts 8:26-40); Cornelius, the angel, and Peter (Acts 10); etc.). Furthermore, some may wrongly conclude that all this may lead to a dampening of the missionary vision and call. But fundamentally, missions is a matter of obedience and not until the last soul on the face of the earth has had an opportunity to hear about salvation through Jesus Christ, can we rightly abdicate our God-given duty to disciple the nations in fulfillment of the Great Commission. Hence, on the other hand, we are more important than we sometimes like to think we are.

Finally, as far as I can discern there are essentially two criteria which enable an unevangelised person to become a candidate for God's special revelatory truth communicated through the various modalities. Initially there must be a recognition that one's own way of seeking after God, and therefore, one's religion, is beyond repair and leads only to hopelessness (Pr. 14:12; Rom. 6:21; 1 Cor. 1:21). Subsequently, an appeal is needed, in one form or another, for divine assistance in order to encounter spiritual truth (cf., Ps. 145:17-19; Jn. 3:21; Acts 10:35).²² Once a person comes to this turning point in his or her life, I see no reason why God would withhold manifesting Himself to that individual through the various modalities of special revelation. Hence, in heaven when we stand

²² Notice that Luke 13:24 and Romans 3:11 speak of seeking God on one's own terms while Jeremiah 29:13 and Hebrews 11:6 refer to seeking God on His terms, that is, from a broken and a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17).

before God, our praise and worship will only abound all the more as we realise that, in light of His infinite wisdom and grace, no one has ever been lost, either in the past, present, or future, who has sincerely wanted to be saved.²³

What does Acts 4:12 really mean?

In responding to this question, Clark Pinnock writes: “Biblical authority means heeding the positive teaching of the Bible and not reading our ideas into it—however precious our opinions are to us. I am sure that Acts 4:12 is often taken to settle questions it does not address. . . . The first such question is the eschatological fate of unevangelised people, whether they lived before or after Christ. Although this is a question that weighs heavily on our minds, Acts 4:12 does not say anything about it. The text speaks forcefully about the incomparable power of Jesus’ name to save (and heal) those who hear and respond to the good news, but it does not comment on the fate of the heathen” (*Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who have Never Heard*, William Crockett & James Sigountos, eds., Baker, 1993:109-110). Although Pinnock’s emphasis on the healing nature of the gospel is sound, his assertion that this verse has nothing to say with regards to the destiny on the unevangelised, demands a second look.

The observant reader of this verse will notice that there are two phrases of universal proportions. First, “no other name under heaven” (NASB) highlights the vertical heaven-earth dimension and clearly teaches that there is no name, that is, authority or power, except the name of Jesus, by which people on earth can find redemption before God who is in heaven. Second, “that has been given among men” emphasises the horizontal-human dimension and plainly reveals that among humankind there has only been

²³ Obviously I haven’t been able to touch on all the issues related to the unevangelised in this presentation. For those interested in a more detailed discussion, see my book: *The Revelation of God Among the Unevangelised* (William Carey Library, 2000).

given one name, the name of Jesus, “by which we must be saved.” One may want to argue about the possibility of Jesus’ name saving people before His Incarnation since it was not specifically known or widely proclaimed, but in our day and age, we have no justification for doing so either in relation to ourselves or the unevangelised.

**‘TOWARD SOLVING
THE PROBLEM OF
THE UNEVANGELIZED’:
A RESPONSE TO
CHRISTOPHER LITTLE**

Keith Ferdinando

Traditionally most Christians have held that salvation from sin, death and hell is to be found only through faith in the person and work of Christ, a view identified as ‘Christian exclusivism’. However, as Harold Netland notes, ‘Christian exclusivism has fallen on hard times. Not only is it being rejected by non-Christians as naive and arrogant, but it is increasingly being criticised from within the Christian community as well for alleged intolerance and for being a vestige of an immoral religious imperialism’.¹ There are in fact many reasons for the attack on the exclusivist position, one of which points to the millions, even billions, of people who both now and throughout history have never heard the gospel, and who have therefore had no evident possibility of responding to it. Those

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¹ Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991), 27.

who employ this particular argument claim that such a position is intolerable, for it means that myriads have no chance of finding salvation and so are eternally and hopelessly lost 'through no fault of their own'. This frequently leads on to an inclusivist or pluralist conclusion. Inclusivism affirms that in some sense Christ remains a unique revelation of God but at the same time argues that he is present in revelation and salvation in other religious traditions too. Pluralism rejects any notion of Christian uniqueness. Either way, space is opened up for the salvation of those who have never heard the gospel, and the 'problem of the unevangelized' is thereby resolved.

Clearly, therefore, Christopher Little is grappling with an issue which is of concern for many. In the African context itself, the eternal fate of the ancestors who lived before the gospel was accessible within their societies is a question that has provoked considerable discussion, and continues to do so. It is evident that Little feels the weight of 'the problem of the unevangelized', and it is there that his argument takes its point of departure, in very much the terms outlined above: 'are they condemned through no fault of their own?' he asks. Thus he apparently shares the view that it would be unjust to condemn those who have not had the opportunity to respond to the gospel, while at the same time seeking to pursue a solution that avoids both inclusivism and pluralism. His discussion of Acts 4:12 indicates that he believes in the uniqueness of Christ, and in the main body of his article he refers to the necessity of a 'salvific relationship' with God which is brought about through the communication of 'His special revelatory truth'.

Furthermore, he argues that such a communication does not take place by means of general revelation: 'the idea that general revelation, whatever that information might be, provides hope for the unevangelized encountering salvation before God is unfounded, since humanity continuously responds negatively which results in condemnation.' Instead, God uses 'the modalities of special revelation' 'to initiate, direct, sustain, and fulfil a salvific relationship with himself on behalf of whosoever will': it is in this way, Little argues, that he reaches those who have not heard the proclamation of the gospel through the agency of a human

messenger. These modalities include the means traditionally identified with the communication of the gospel, such as human messengers and the written word of God, but also miracles, dreams, visions and angels which may operate independently of the Bible and the church. Thus, according to Little, God communicates with unevangelized people using the same methods that he has used to communicate special revelation, methods that are identified in various biblical accounts of the transmission of revelation. In defending this position Little strongly affirms God's sovereign freedom as far as communicating salvation is concerned: 'we must recognise that God is not limited either by the activity of the Church or the spread of the Bible to accomplish his redemptive purposes in history.' However, in Little's view, God does not apparently communicate with all the unevangelized through the use of such special means. Some are 'candidates' for special revelatory truth, and to be a 'candidate' means meeting certain criteria which, Little implies, not all are able to do. Accordingly, 'candidates' must recognise the hopelessness of their own religion and appeal for 'divine assistance in order to encounter spiritual truth'.

Thus, Little affirms the 'possibility' of the unevangelized 'finding and knowing God' through the 'modalities of special revelation.' 'There is great hope for the unevangelized because they have never existed, exist or will exist, without the possibility of finding and knowing God.' Moreover, the optimistic tone of his article suggests that this is more than a 'possibility', and that some have indeed been saved in that way. Nowhere, however, does he indicate how significant the size of this hypothetical group might be, which leaves the argument rather inconclusive and ambivalent, perhaps inevitably so. Indeed, the concluding proposition, 'no one has ever been lost, either in the past, present, or future, who has sincerely wanted to be saved', is one to which probably all evangelicals would assent without much difficulty, and which in practice tells us precious little about the fate of the unevangelized.

Little's argument may therefore not actually take us very far forward, even if we were to accept his thinking. Indeed, the category of candidates 'for God's special revelatory truth communicated through the various modalities', may, on the basis of

his own reasoning, be a null one. But the argument is itself vulnerable to weighty criticism at a number of other points too.²

First, the starting point of the discussion is seriously flawed. Little apparently goes along with the view that it would be unjust for men and women to be condemned without having had the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. This is the implication of the series of questions he raises in the first paragraph: 'Are they part of the elect without knowing it, are they condemned through no fault of their own, or, should they be considered as within the redemptive activity of our sovereign God?' As he approaches 'the problem of the unevangelized', this is the full range of options which he recognises. The first presumably embraces the inclusivist and pluralist positions which Little rejects. The last is the route he wishes to follow, claiming that the unevangelized are 'within the redemptive activity of our sovereign God' by virtue of 'modalities of special revelation'. Accordingly, he implies that if that were not the case, if they are not 'within the redemptive activity of our sovereign God', then one must conclude that they are indeed 'condemned through no fault of their own.' Now, by definition, the very notion of a holy, just and infinitely wise God condemning people 'through no fault of their own' must be rejected, and Little of course does so as would any thoughtful Christian. But he presumably thinks some people believe or teach such a position, and one suspects that he uses the phrase to refer to the traditional or exclusivist approach to the question of the unevangelized, the view that men and women must hear the gospel of Christ and respond to it with faith and repentance in order to be saved. It is this view that is unfair because it means, in Little's view and, to be fair, in that of many others, that people are condemned for failing to respond to a message they never heard. If that were

² The argument that follows focuses on what appears to be Little's principal thesis. Other disputable points are not necessarily discussed, such as the dubious claim that the witness of the Gentile conscience (Romans 2:14-15) takes place only at the final judgement, or the very speculative interpretation of the significance of the names of Cain and Abel.

indeed the case it would be patently unjust and would inevitably generate a 'problem of the unevangelized'.

However, this is not an accurate representation of the traditional position, and it is very questionable whether anybody actually holds such a view. God's righteous judgement falls on men and women not because they do not respond to the gospel, but because they are rebels and sinners, and because their sin merits his wrath and condemnation. The consistent and constant argument of Scripture is summed up in Paul's terse declarations: 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' and 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom 3:23; 6:23). Clowney summarises the testimony of the Old Testament in this way:

The biblical prophets and poets struggle with this issue. Indeed it is the great question for the whole Old Testament. Sin has entered the world and the death knell sounds through the genealogies of Genesis. The doom that a holy God pronounces on sinful mankind is everywhere at hand.³

Rejection of the gospel is certainly sin, and grievously aggravates the already desperate situation of the sinner; but it is not rejection of the gospel as such that is the reason for condemnation, and certainly not ignorance of it, but rebellion against a holy God. All men and women deserve judgement because of their sin: none are condemned 'through no fault of their own'. The dying thief speaks for the whole of humanity, 'We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve' (Lk 23:41); repentance to salvation implies the recognition of that simple fact. That there is a gospel, and that any hear it at all, is due to the pure grace of God towards those who deserve only death. Once this is recognised, 'the problem of the unevangelized' is greatly diminished, since there is no longer any question of the arbitrary condemnation of the innocent. There are no doubt still questions to which we might like answers: how do we explain the particularity of grace? But grace is by definition free and undeserved, and the giver may bestow his gift as he wills. The

³ E.P. Clowney, 'The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith', in D.A. Carson (ed.), *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 23.

acute problem of apparent divine injustice, expressed by the question 'are they condemned through no fault of their own', is found to be non-existent.

Second, the whole notion of becoming a candidate for God's special revelatory truth is problematic. On the basis of Little's criteria, is anybody a candidate? And can anybody ever be a candidate? Little's conception is anthropocentric, and implies the necessity of some worthiness on the part of the 'candidate' before God acts. Indeed it looks very much like semi-Pelagianism. There is already a suggestion of this when he deals with Abraham's call. He proposes that God chose Abraham because of his 'positive response to the special revelatory truth contained in the Noahic covenant.' However, there is no suggestion of this in the biblical text, and it would be more consistent with the testimony of the rest of Scripture to affirm that Abraham's call was the result of free and unmerited grace. The revelation of truth is a sovereign act of God, for which none become 'candidates' by meeting particular criteria. Indeed, the Scriptures continually stress the hopelessness of humankind apart from grace. It is clear in Ephesians 2 where Paul speaks of being dead 'in transgressions and sins'; or in Romans 8:6-7, 'the mind of sinful man is death .. the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so'; or in John 6:37, 'all that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away'. Throughout the emphasis is on God's initiative in redemption. Little insists on God's sovereignty with respect to the means of communicating the gospel, but he is weak on divine sovereignty in the application of redemption to the sinner: people become 'candidates' for special revelatory truth when they recognise that their own religion is hopeless and appeal to him for help. They are self-selecting.

Third, Little affirms God's ability to reveal himself apart from messengers of the gospel: 'we must recognize that God is not limited either by the activity of the Church or the spread of the Bible to accomplish His redemptive purposes in history'. He quotes McGrath in support: 'The Creator is not dependent on his creation in achieving his purposes.' There is no disputing this; of course God can act as he wills. He is indeed free in all that he does, totally

unconstrained by his creation. However, there is more than this to be said on the subject. While it is true that God is free to use or not to use the church and the Scriptures to bring about the spread of the gospel, the question is rather whether there are certain methods he has determined to use, and whether in practice he does freely and sovereignly bind himself to the use of specified means. In other words, the fact that he *can* use means other than the church and the Bible, does not in practice mean that he *does* do so. The question needs to be decided on the basis of the biblical testimony, at which point texts such as Romans 10:14 - 'And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?' - become highly significant.

Little argues that Romans 10:14 is 'simply highlighting our human responsibility as Christ's ambassadors, nothing more and nothing less'. However, such an approach to the meaning of the verse is essentially reductionist. Paul highlights the responsibility given to human beings to preach the gospel precisely because this is the way God has appointed for its communication. In the context of the passage as a whole, 'the chain of questions ... indicates the impossibility of the Jews' calling upon Christ unless certain preconditions have been fulfilled,'⁴ among which is the proclamation of the gospel by messengers sent by God. If indeed significant numbers of humanity will hear the good news through 'the modalities of special revelation' the argument would break down. In answer to his question, 'how can they hear without someone preaching to them?', Paul certainly seems to expect the response, 'in such a case they cannot hear.' However, Little would presumably give the reply, 'they will hear through visions, dreams, angels, miraculous events', thereby undermining the whole force of Paul's argument. Moreover, such an answer most certainly attenuates the force of the missionary imperative. Hywel Jones writes, 'as he was about to leave this earth and return to heaven, the Lord commanded his apostles, and through them his church, to "go

⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans*, vol. II (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1979), 529.

and make disciples of all nations ...” Did he send them on an unnecessary task, a fool’s errand? Or is their going out into all the world with the gospel as essential in its own way, as was his coming down into it?”⁵ There will inevitably be a reduced sense of urgency about the task of bringing the gospel to the lost, if there is good reason to suppose that they will have the opportunity to receive it by other means. Indeed, one might even suppose that if God were to deal directly with human souls it would be far better for missionaries, imperfect as they are, to keep well clear and not risk undermining his work by their own clumsiness.

This brings us to a fourth point, and to the fundamental stage of Little’s argument. He suggests that God uses ‘the modalities of special revelation’ to bring saving truth to those to whom the gospel has not been preached and who do not have access to the Bible. As an introduction to the development of this point, which is found largely in the final section of the article, he clearly attaches great significance to the words of Elihu in Job 33:13-33: ‘the soteriological implications of this passage as it pertains to the state of the unevangelized are astounding, and therefore, worthy of much consideration.’ But the claim is very doubtful, and indeed the use of such hyperbolic language alerts the reader to the need for vigilance in evaluating it. Thus, first, Job is already a worshipper of the true God and the same is true of his ‘comforters’. It is this after all that makes the whole argument of the book meaningful: it is precisely because of his faith that the problem of his suffering is so acute. The dreams, visions, angels and mediators of which the passage speaks are therefore to be understood in the context of belief. Similarly, the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh were incomprehensible without interpretation by those who were already children of God; they were not self-explanatory pointers to the true God. Moreover, contrary to Little’s view, the text certainly does suggest that Job found the subsequent divine theophany unusual: ‘My ears had heard of you but now mine eyes have seen you’ (Job 42:5). There was an immediacy in the revelation that took him by

⁵ H.R. Jones, *Only One Way* (Bromley, England: Day One Publications, 1996), 136.

surprise and was quite unlike anything he had known before, and certainly beyond the dreams that Elihu had spoken of. It is clear that Job was overwhelmed by the theophany, and there is no indication that he had had such experiences previously during his life: quite the contrary, what happened was exceptional. And anyway, once again the theophany took place in the context of a believer's experience, not that of an outsider. It is very doubtful whether this passage has any clear-cut soteriological implications for the unevangelized at all.

Turning then to the final section, entitled 'Modalities of Special Revelation', what biblical arguments does Little adduce to support his position? This is the crucial phase of his whole thesis, for he needs to show from the biblical record that God does indeed continue to save men and women through 'the modalities of special revelation' apart from the proclamation of the gospel through human agents. However, on close examination none of the examples he cites actually sustains his case. It is questionable whether his first category, 'oral tradition' is in fact a 'modality of special revelation' at all. In Scripture it is normally simply a means by which the data of special revelation are passed on. Paul refers to such transmission on several occasions in his letters (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3; 2 Tim 2:2). The case of Rahab, cited by Little, involves somebody who had heard of God's acts of salvation - his special revelation - and so put her trust in him. She did not benefit from a 'modality of special revelation' but simply from the oral transmission of special revelation itself, the news of what God had done in Egypt and at the Red Sea. Similarly, if the devout men who heard the gospel preached at Pentecost took the message home with them and passed it on, they were just doing what missionaries are supposed to do. Of course, as Little says, the possibility - even probability - exists that the message of salvation was then passed on to subsequent generations; but that should always be the case, and it is difficult to see how it would support his case if it happened on this occasion.

As an example of 'miraculous events' constituting 'modalities of special revelation', Little refers to Saul's conversion. It does indeed prove 'that God is not limited to human agency', but that is not in

question, and the whole incident offers scant support for Little's case. First, the miraculous event led immediately to a visit by a messenger of the gospel, Ananias, which is very significant, as we shall note later. Furthermore, this is the conversion and call of a man to the unique office of apostle, and any generalisation based on it must therefore be problematic. Paul himself alludes to the unique nature of his experience in 1 Corinthians 9:1: 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' Third, Saul was already well aware of Old Testament revelation and doubtless very familiar with the claims and teaching of the church which he was persecuting: it is not very convincing to identify him as a part of 'the problem of the unevangelized'. Little also quotes the conversion of the emperor Constantine as an example of 'God working redemptively through the modalities of special revelation' by 'miraculous events'. The authenticity of Constantine's 'conversion' is itself the subject of much debate, and there is in any case no doubt that he was already very well aware of the existence of the church and its teaching when he received his 'vision'. The very fact that Little has to use such an example actually implies the weakness of his case.

There is no evidence that either of the two biblical dreams that Little refers to (Abimelech, Gen 20:3; the magi, Matt 2:12) was instrumental in the conversion of the recipients. It would be helpful to have more detail and documentation on the case of Adiri, the pagan of Dutch Guiana, cited by Little who himself found it in Strong's *Systematic Theology*. The incident may indeed be significant, not so much because it supports Little's case, but because in the visions he received Adiri was told 'to go to the missionaries for instruction'. The case is parallel to that of Saul, to whom Ananias was sent. The role of missionaries appears to have been an integral part of his conversion experience, and the visions or dreams guided him to go to them for teaching. We will return to this later.

Little quotes Abraham (Gen 15:1), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:28; 4:34-37), and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-6), as examples of those who received visions. The first is not relevant to his thesis, as Abraham was actually receiving special revelation and was not just a beneficiary of a 'modality of special revelation'. His crucial role in

the whole history of redemption makes him a quite exceptional case from which it is not possible to make any extrapolation. Nebuchadnezzar's visions were interpreted by Daniel - as with Saul's vision of Christ and the dream of Adiri from Dutch Guiana. They were not self-explanatory: it was the Lord's messenger who communicated their meaning. Similarly Cornelius was told to send for Peter.

Little's references to angels bringing the gospel similarly contribute little to his argument. The angels who informed the shepherds of the birth of Christ were bringing special revelation itself at the central moment of redemption history. The reference to the angel who preached the eternal gospel in Revelation 14:6 raises a number of issues. First, in view of the apocalyptic genre of the whole book, it is legitimate to enquire whether in this and the following verses John is referring to the intervention of a literal, visible angel, or whether the text is to be understood in some other way. Second, the emphasis in these verses is on judgement. Third, the announcements contained in the verses apparently refer to unique events of world-wide significance that are to take place at the end of history, and not to the way in which the gospel advances normally. Again, Little seeks to generalise from what appears to be an exceptional and unique situation.

Little goes on to refer to human messengers as examples of God working salvifically through 'modalities of special revelation', but it is not at all clear how this fits his argument. All of those referred to, Jonah, John the Baptist and Stephen, are effectively missionary communicators, proclaiming the gospel. Insofar as we have a 'modality of special revelation' here, it is because these men were in fact means through which God conveyed special revelation itself in the course of their regular ministry. However, Little's case surely is that God communicates his gospel in the absence of human missionary proclamation. These cases do nothing to establish that he does so.

The last category in this section is the written Word of God. Little writes: 'The Bible provides the only objective basis by which to evaluate the information that comes through the other

modalities. Obviously, if after doing our homework, a message delivered by any of the other modalities does not conform to the teaching of Scripture, it must be rejected.' This is certainly true, but what does it do for Little's argument? He seems to suggest that where 'modalities of special revelation' are used to communicate the gospel, the Bible must be present to validate the message. However, if the Bible is already present in such a context, special revelation itself is already present and the need for such modalities is largely removed.

In conclusion, none of the examples Little quotes substantiates his thesis. In every case what the text refers to is either the use of a 'modality of special revelation' precisely to communicate special revelation, or the intervention of a dream or vision to direct the recipient to those human messengers called by God to communicate his unique Word. Little refers to a survey of 100 Muslim converts which found that 'over one-half of these believers have had at least one (dream or vision) before or after conversion'. However, to evaluate the significance of this information more questions need to be asked. Were these people saved *uniquely* through a dream or vision or, as in the case of Saul, Nebuchadnezzar and Adiri, did the dream or vision direct them to a Christian preacher or missionary? There is indeed very strong evidence to suggest that dreams and visions play a major role in many Muslim conversions. However, the evidence also suggests that in the case of those converted in that way, the dreams usually start a process which often takes some years to complete before actual conversion occurs. It is not the dream as such that brings about conversion; rather the dream directs the individual to go to somebody who can explain the gospel, which is what the Bible suggests should happen in the cases referred to above. It certainly appears that in God's economy human messengers are an essential element in bringing the gospel to the unevangelized.

Finally, if Little's argument were valid, one would expect some evidence of its truth in the records of missionary endeavour. He is after all very optimistic about the implications of the case he puts forward: 'there is great hope for the unevangelized because they have never existed, exist, or will exist, without the possibility of

finding and knowing God'. He presumably believes that some, even significant numbers, of the unevangelized, have found Christ through these 'special modalities'. But, if that were the case, would it not be reasonable to suppose that as missionaries have gradually penetrated the unreached areas of the globe, they would have come across individuals, groups, even whole communities, who had indeed found God in this way and were already worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ? Do the annals of mission history suggest that this has happened and, if so, why does Little not refer to such cases to reinforce his position? For, if what he is arguing is true, one would expect to find empirical evidence for it. Theology, after all, ought to correspond to reality; if not, what is the point of it?

Ultimately Little's theory is a dangerous one, for it seeks to give reasons for a hope which is not justified. An invalid, when offered false hope, may well respond by neglecting the true remedy for his condition. In this case the biblical answer to 'the problem of the unevangelized' is to evangelize them: God's solution, and their one hope, is mission. He is himself a God of mission who sends his own Son for the lost, and the gospel records all refer to the transmission of the missionary mandate to his disciples. It is this which constitutes the divine response to an unevangelized world. In his favour, Little rejects inclusivist and pluralist approaches to the 'problem', but the outcome of his theory is likely to be similar. Without either biblical or empirical support, its tendency is to contribute to the erosion of the missionary imperative within our churches, and so to aggravate 'the problem of the unevangelized'.

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THE CHALLENGE OF THE JESUS SEMINAR TO BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN AFRICA

Gwamna Dogara Je' Adayibe

In this article Dr. Je' Adayibe addresses the controversial Jesus Seminar and the critical views that have become rampant in western New Testament studies. Instead of embracing western scholarship wholesale, Dr. Je' Adayibe challenges African New Testament scholars to engage in New Testament scholarship with their own questions and seek their own answers from Scripture.

INTRODUCTION

The Jesus Seminar has emerged in the last two decades as the most controversial arm of New Testament scholarship. From 1985, the Jesus Seminar is the most celebrated offshoot of a spate of Jesus Studies which "has made Jesus into a media event."¹ The very critical and controversial views and methodologies adopted by the Jesus Seminar have once again brought the need for closer New Testament studies into the front burner. The precursors of critical New Testament Studies produced the various "quests" for the "historical Jesus" with Rudolf Bultmann and Albert Schweitzer as its indisputable champions.

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¹ James R. Edwards, "Who do scholars say that I am?" *Christianity Today*, March 4, 1996, p. 15.

Following in this wave have been similar controversial works that have added to the critical scholarship of the New Testament. Some of these works include: Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child and Sophia's Prophet*; Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*; Barbara Thiering's, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secrets of His life*; and her, *Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls*; Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*; John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*; Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*; and similar others.² These works seem to have provided the launching pad for the Jesus Seminar adventure.

Several observations and questions have been raised in respect of the objectivity, methodology and scholarship merit of the Jesus Seminar. One of such concerted reactions is the *Jesus Under Fire*, edited by Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, in which several evangelical biblical scholars have reacted variously to the Jesus Seminar, laying bare the Seminar's spurious arguments, methodology and their conclusions. Even Ben Witherington III has devoted a chapter on the "Jesus of the Jesus Seminar" in his *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*.³

As the new discourse on the "Jesus Quest" or the "Jesus Debate" rages on, "what is rather striking is that it leaves out many older scholars, including many from Europe and the Third World."⁴ The main interest and the thrust of this paper is drawn from the fact that, again, it is from the so-called West that this critical and some what "dangerous" scholarship is being born, nurtured and sustained, for the possible exportation to the Third World, including Africa. Any serious Biblical scholar in Africa, therefore, needs to be worried about the transportation of this approach to biblical scholarship in our Seminaries, Bible Colleges and Universities. This paper seeks to discuss the Jesus Seminar, their origin, aims, methodologies and

² *Ibid.*, p. 16. N.T. Wright has also documented a list of critical scholars in his, *Who was Jesus?* to support this fact.

³ Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, New Expanded Edition, Inter-Varsity Press, Illinois, 1997, pp. 42-47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.43.

their fallacies, in order to provide information and safeguards to unguarded Biblical scholarship which may be dangerous to us in Africa.

The insights drawn therefrom might also help us to re-appraise new trends in New Testament scholarship generally.

THE JESUS SEMINAR

Origin

The Jesus Seminar began in 1985 led by Robert Funk. Other Board Members include: John Dominic Crossan, Fred Francis, Burton Mack, and Robert Tannehill. These and other members (Fellows) of the Jesus Seminar are mostly liberal scholars, trained in the most liberal theological institutions in America.⁵ As Craig L. Blomberg has noted, "the Jesus Seminar does not come anywhere close to reflecting an adequate cross-section of contemporary New Testament scholars."⁶ At best, the Seminar "involves not only Protestants and Catholics, but also Jews, New Agers, and people of no religious commitment, including Marxists and Atheists."⁷

The members of the Jesus Seminar derive their motivation from some basic aims and presuppositions which guide their methodology as well.

The Aims Include:

- i. To find out the "real facts" about Jesus, that is, it's own version of the so-called "quest of the historical Jesus."
- ii. To consider the identity of Jesus and the authenticity of the Gospel records.
- iii. To replace the Church's picture of Jesus with a reconstruction it deemed more historically adequate and more serviceable to life in the world today.

⁵ Tim Lahaye, *Jesus: Who is He?* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1997), 17.

⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, "Where do we start studying Jesus?," In Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1995), 20.

⁷ James R. Edwards, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

- iv. Funk says of the Jesus Seminar, that, “we need a new narrative of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus differently in the grand scheme, the epic story.”⁸

The Presuppositions Are That:

- i. The supernatural cannot occur. Thus, they deny the historic Christian faith, including the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His substitutionary atonement, His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven.⁹
- ii. The witness of the gospels’ writers cannot be accepted because they are passionately committed to what they are saying. Passionate witnesses, the Fellows assume, distort the evidence.
- iii. The traditional Christianity is simply a colossal mistake, and the gospels are gross misrepresentations of Jesus.

Thus, the Jesus Seminar “hails itself as liberator from the ‘tyranny,’ ‘oppression,’ and ‘blindness’ of Jesus’ Babylonian captivity by Orthodox Christianity.”¹⁰

Today, the two famous published works under the auspices of the Jesus Seminar summarise their goals, methodology, findings and conclusions. They are: *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus – A New Translation and Commentary* (Macmillan 1993); and *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*, (Harper Collins, 1998). They are their own standard translation called the *Scholars Version* (SV) of the Bible. These two books provide us some highlights into understanding the Jesus Seminar and their “successes” so far, which have also elicited reactions from other Biblical scholars. Other similar works have been published by some Fellows of the Jesus Seminar. A look at their methodology will help to give us a clue as to their observations, findings and conclusions.

⁸ Marianne Meyer Thompson, “The Jesus Seminar.” In *Theology News and Notes*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, June, 1999, p. 16.

⁹ Tim LaHaye, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁰ James R. Edwards, *op. Cit.*, p. 15.

Methodology

What has attracted considerable interest to the Jesus Seminar is their methodology of research which has resulted into their findings and conclusions.

The Jesus Seminar uses the historical method of research along with the social-scientific criticism. The computer also plays an important role in their calculations. The Jesus Seminar meet to present papers, discuss texts, and "then, with self-conscious theatricality, vote on blocks of text (sometimes as entire section, sometimes as little as a word or two) using coloured beads."¹¹ The colour codes signify the following:

- i. Casting a red bead means that the scholar thinks Jesus said this or at least something very much like it.
- ii. Pink signals that he probably said that.
- iii. Gray means that Jesus probably did not say this, but maybe something of his thought hides obscurely behind the passage.
- iv. Black means that Jesus did not say this at all.

D.A. Carson has provided a hint as to how their calculations are made: On the grade point average scheme, Red = 3, Pink = 2, Gray = 1 and Black = 0. The ballots are added up and divided by the number of votes cast in order to ascertain the weighted average. The scale is then converted to percentages. For a text to be printed in red, it has to rate .7501 or higher. Pink print reflects .5001 to .7500, gray ranges from .2501 or .5000, and black .2500 or under.¹²

After subjecting the gospels to this method, the following were their findings:

- i. In the overall, 82% of Jesus' words in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were judged inauthentic.
- ii. Only 18% of the sayings of Jesus are lettered red, that is, those that Jesus is believed to have truly said. They form the fifteen sayings of Jesus, all of which are short and pungent remarks.

¹¹ D.A. Carson, "Five Gospels," in *Christianity Today*, April 25, 1994, 30.

¹² *Ibid.*

- iii. Only one saying in Mark makes the red letter. That is Mark 12:17 which says, "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."
- iv. That Jesus did not teach the Lord's prayer.
- v. For the Gospel of John, the "Fellows" of the Jesus Seminar were unable to find a single saying they could with certainty trace back to the historical Jesus. The Seminar in fact regards "the Fourth Gospel as alien to the real Jesus, the Carpenter from Nazareth."¹³
- vi. 16% of the acts attributed to Jesus could be coloured red or pink, and hence were likely actions done by or to him.

Their outline of Jesus' life is summarized as: He was baptized by John, had followers, but did not "call" them, was arrested, tried and crucified as a public nuisance. But Jesus did not walk on water, feed the multitude, change water into wine, or raise Lazarus from the dead, neither did he himself rise bodily from the dead.¹⁴ Here, Jesus emerges neither as a miracle worker, eschatological prophet, nor even the Messiah.

The Fellows reluctantly admitted that Jesus probably functioned as today's "faith healer" and that the only "unusual curative powers" Jesus performed were in the realm of the psychosomatic and not the miraculous.¹⁵ Surprisingly, the Seminar loves the "Q" which it has not seen more than Mark.

It also patronizes the Gospel of Thomas, an apocryphal Gnostic material which contains 114 sayings. Robert Funk, the leader of the Seminar has now called for a Canon Council to meet with the Jesus Seminar to "discuss whether the Book of Revelation should be retained as part of the New Testament, in view of the recent tragic events in Waco, Texas, and the rising abuse of the last book in the New Testament."¹⁶

¹³ James R. Edwards, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Marianne Meye Thompson, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁵ D.A. Carson, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

A look at the Jesus Seminar will show, as N.T. Wright has rightly noted that, "research into Jesus himself has long been controversial, not least among devout Christians."¹⁷ In fact, "many Jesus scholars of the last two centuries have, of course, thrown scripture out of the window and reconstructed a Jesus quite different from what we find in the New Testament."¹⁸ At best, these critical approaches to New Testament studies are refurbished and revised ideas concocted by French sceptics and German rationalists, in the likes of Voltaire, Rousseau, Hegel and others.

A critical appraisal of the Jesus Seminar shows some of their flaws which have in turn informed their conclusions. To reduce the sayings of Jesus into colour beads is to over-dramatise and simplify the Jesus story which has survived two millennia. Also to reduce the gospel material into twentieth century instruments of research including the computer techniques to a world in which these techniques were non-existent is grossly unfair and the results obviously predictable.

Understanding Jesus today entails a thorough background of the first century Palestinian world in which Jesus came involving political, social, religious and even economic contexts in which the gospel material evolved.

The presuppositions on which the Jesus Seminar derive their strength are also faulty. To assume that Jesus' disciples and other witnesses of the early Christian witness could not be relied upon, contradicts the main essence of eyewitness accounts in validating historical occurrences.

In the first place, even to attempt a reconstruction of the Jesus of the Seminar from the gospels entails an appreciation of why the evangelists wrote what they wrote. John 20:13 provides the essence: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Unfortunately, the Seminar rejects Johannine materials entirely which it sees as "inauthentic." Of course, the major aim of John's writing was to combat Gnostic and docetic

¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (SPCK, London, 2000), 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

tendencies of the first century Christianity which the Jesus Seminar seems to have resurrected with added severe extremes. It is also true that, "modern scholarship has correctly shown that the Gospels are not strict biographies, but the standpoint of faith and for the purpose of furthering faith."¹⁹

Today, the literary dependence on critical research cannot truly deny the fact that early Christian churches were oral communities before the gospels were written and they form part of the source reservoirs of the gospel material. The first century Palestinian was not one of the written word but of the spoken word. It was a culture of memory but where good reporting was also endured (see Lk. 1:3). The probability therefore that, "the first Christians were concerned to retain and pass on the memory of what Jesus said and did remains undiminished."²⁰ To deny this fact is to "cut Christianity off from its historical foundation and fountainhead."²¹

What the Jesus Seminar also missed was what Derrell L. Bock has observed, that, "in examining the wording of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, we must distinguish between the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus ("his very words") and the *ipsissima vox* ("his very voice"), that is, the presence of his teaching summarised."²² Here, the point is that it is probable that "Jesus gave most of his teaching in Aramaic, the dominant public language of first century Palestine where Jesus ministered, whereas the Gospels were written in Greek, the dominant language of the larger first century Greco-Roman world in which the Gospels were addressed."²³

What was important was the sense of what Jesus had said, not a precision of the verbal form. And as Dunn concludes on this, "any one familiar with the range of modern translations of the Bible will take the point without difficulty."²⁴ This, the Seminar finds difficult to accept as reasonable argument.

¹⁹ James R. Edwards, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

²⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *The Living Word* (Fortress Press Philadelphia, 1987), 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²² Derrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive or Memorex?" in Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

For Ben Witherington III, the problem with the Jesus Seminar is not in their conclusions and affirmations, but what they omit. These include Jesus' parables, controversy dialogues and eschatological sayings. But the Seminar accepts a Jesus who was a travelling sage, who traded in proverbial wisdom. They contend that Jesus was not a controversialist, never initiated debates or controversies, and was passive until someone questioned or criticized him or his followers. He was not a prophet or a radical reformer.²⁵

Again, these "omissions" raise more fundamental questions for the Seminar to address. That Jesus was a man of wisdom is true, but he was not just a wisdom man. That Jesus was not a controversialist but a pacifist contradicts the gospel portrait of Jesus. The opposition which climaxed in his crucifixion is a typical example of his so-called controversial life and teaching. And if the Scribes and Pharisees did not see Jesus as a radical reformer and a self-proclaimed prophet, then the Jesus Seminar needs to proffer reasons why these sects rejected Jesus, whom even the Zealots saw as a potential revolutionary to lead them in battle against the Roman imperialists (Jn. 6:15). The Seminar has raised more issues in which they have not sufficiently addressed. And as Carson has noted, "the real irony is that, in some ways, the Jesus Seminar has itself become a parody of what it rejects – in tone and attitude, in its reductionism and self-confident exclusivism."²⁶

THE JESUS SEMINAR AND BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP IN AFRICA

From our discourse in the foregoing, it is quite obvious that the Jesus Seminar poses a major challenge to biblical scholarship in Africa. Biblical scholars in Africa have a major task to be able to confront the so-called critical approaches to New Testament studies. This, they can do through sieving the "wheat" from the "chaff." It is not everything about biblical scholarship today that is necessary for our situation. Instead, these critical approaches have rather compounded our scholarship which in turn depict the level of our dependence on ready-made western imported theories and principles

²⁵ Ben Witherington III, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

²⁶ D.A. Carson, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

of doing biblical research. African scholars must be able to ask their own questions and provide answers in respect to their own understanding of the biblical text and how it conveys meaning to them. African biblical scholars must also reject unguarded biblical scholarship that does not conform to the universally acceptable standards and norms. It is even worse, when such endeavour does not involve the African voice in its "quest." Africans must rediscover their leading role in charting a new course for biblical scholarship from a very "neutral" and "objective" perspective. The challenge to African biblical scholars also calls for a commitment to literary documentation of its own researches, observations, and conclusions. Africans must project their own voice in respect of biblical scholarship today and need to join in the new biblical scholarship that emphasises the understanding of biblical backgrounds for more effective study. For any meaningful contextual endeavour using the biblical text for the African milieu (which is the new emphasis in Africa today), this challenge cannot be better emphasised. Our understanding of the Bible world from its original sources and experiences will better equip us to understand and teach it much more from an informed background, than depending on ideas and opinions of scholars whose interests, goals and methodologies are tailored to serve their own interests.

CONCLUSION

The premises upon which the Jesus Seminar derives their strength are based on the popular scientific fallacy of the denial of the supernatural. And to subject the gospel material, written within the world in which the supernatural was held in high esteem, is to use wrong instruments in doing biblical research. That scientific method of doing research through observation, testing, proving and experimentation are inadequate in biblical research is a fact that cannot be denied. This is a point which the Seminar has not appreciated. This explains why the Jesus Seminar simply rejected the miraculous elements of Jesus' ministry and his apocalyptic prophecies, which do not fit into their own models of interpretation. These were the same reductionist methods of the previous centuries that have characterised critical biblical scholarship with all their inglorious past. Thus, the Seminar has failed to reconcile its

conclusions with the basic historic evidence upon which the gospel material evolved and upon which Christianity was founded, nurtured and sustained for the past two millennia.

The Jesus Seminar could as well learn from the rich resource material of biblical backgrounds which have been popularised of recent in the writings of F.F. Bruce, Merrill C. Tenney, Bo Reicke, E.M. Baiklock, Robert H. Gundry, Ralph Martin, Bruce M. Metzger, N.T. Wright, Craig S. Keener, Ben Witherington III, R.T. Rance and Craig L. Blomberg, among others. A research into extra-biblical material will shed more light on our understanding of the biblical text than has have been done by some of these scholars mentioned above, and will provide more viable and effective methodologies for modern day biblical studies than what the Jesus Seminar has achieved.

BOOK REVIEWS

Mark A. Noll

***Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the
History of Christianity***

Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic,
2000 (2nd edition)

Mark A. Noll, Professor of Christian Thought at Wheaton College, has written a captivating introduction to the history of the Christian Church. Unlike the usual church histories which chronicle the important persons, dates and events throughout the past 2,000 years, this book focuses on twelve "Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity."

This novel approach, updated in this second edition of the same title, arose out of the author's experience. When seeking to organise a Christian history course for adult education in church and a one-semester survey history of Christianity for students at Wheaton College, he decided to organise the lessons around decisive turning points in church history.

The crucial question then arises, "Which events are the decisive moments in the history of Christianity?" Noll acknowledges that others may debate his selection of events. But he contends that such a discussion is a healthy exercise to interpret the flow of events in the church for 2,000 years.

The book is not intended as a comprehensive account of Church History. In fact the author intends it to be a survey for the two millennia of Christian history. Each chapter begins with a Christian hymn and ends with a prayer, each composed within that time period of discussion. Very importantly, each turning point is related to other events that preceded and followed that event. Each chapter contains some long quotations pertinent to the discussion in hand and placed in a highlighted block. Illustrations and pictures

are scattered throughout, but only one small map is found in the entire book; this is a serious deficiency.

The turning points are as follows: 1) The Church Pushed Out on Its Own: The Fall of Jerusalem (AD 70); 2) Realities of Empire: The Council of Nicea (AD 325); 3) Doctrine, Politics and Life in the World: The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451); 4) The Monastic Rescue of the Church: Benedict's Rule (AD 530); 5) The Culmination of Christendom: The Coronation of Charlemagne (AD 800); 6) Division between East and West: The Great Schism (AD 1054); 7) The Beginnings of Protestantism: The Diet of Worms (AD 1521); 8) A New Europe: The English Act of Supremacy (AD 1534); 9) Catholic Reform and Worldwide Outreach: The Founding of the Jesuits (1540); 10) The New Piety: The Conversion of the Wesleys (AD 1738); 11) The French Revolution (AD 1789); 12) The Edinburgh Missionary Conference (AD 1910); 13) Further Turning Points of the Twentieth Century .

By focusing on these twelve major "turning points," the author is able to highlight certain milestones within this 315 page introductory survey of Church History. The book thereby avoids the monotony of endless dates, controversies, personalities and developments which span 2,000 years, which may lose the initiate in Church History in boredom. However, he does use the "turning points" as opportunities to relate these crucial events with significant developments preceding and following the events.

For example, one might have thought that the conversion of Constantine in AD 313, which eventually led to the official recognition of Christianity by the Roman Empire, would be a "decisive moment" in the history of Christianity. Instead, Noll chose The Council of Nicea (AD 325). But he connects this important Council to the conversion of Constantine who then called the bishops to attend the Council of Nicea in order to end the religious strife in the church (and by extension, in the empire). Moreover he introduces the dilemma of imperial politics of the Roman Empire interfering with the internal affairs of the Christian Church, a dilemma which plagued the Church for centuries.

When choosing Benedict's Rule (AD 530) as a "turning point," he does far more than discuss Benedict's *regula*. Noll uses this

topic to discuss the motives and circumstances that led to the rise of monasticism. Furthermore, he portrays the importance and development of monastic movements throughout the middle ages. Thus the selection of “decisive moments” is more than a limited discussion of a “moment” in church history. Those “turning points” are focal points affording the opportunity to summarise in outline form the various developments related to the “turning point.”

This book, however, focuses on Western Church History. The fact is, of course, that most of the development of Christianity for 1800 years was centred in Europe, Eastern and Western. Only in the twelfth “turning point” (The Edinburgh Missionary Conference in AD 1910) does the author sketch the spread of the Christian faith to other parts of the world. It is painful to find only 25 pages devoted to missionary outreach in Asia, South America and Africa.

“Further Turning Points of the Twentieth Century” are mentioned on 20 pages in chapter 13, namely, 1) The Rise and Spread of Pentecostalism; 2) The Second Vatican Council; 3) New Visibility for Women; 4) Bible Translation, and 5) Survival under Communism.

It is an excellent book to introduce Christians to a survey of Christian development. On pages 320-336 are study questions for discussion by students, including questions for today’s church. This book is thoughtful and illuminating.

Mark Noll has achieved the purpose for which he wrote the book: providing a framework for understanding the 2,000 years of Christian history in survey form. It is informative, inspiring and interesting to read.

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G.N. Monsma

***Economic Theory and Practice
in Biblical Perspective***

Potchefstroomse University:
Institute for Reformational Studies, 1998

M. D. Williams

***Homosexuality, Scripture
and the Body of Christ***

Potchefstroomse University:
Institute for Reformational Studies, 1997

H. Bavinck

The Certainty of Faith

Potchefstroomse University:
Institute for Reformational Studies, 1998

These three study pamphlets come out of Potchefstroomse University in South Africa. The first consists of two papers delivered by the author, a professor from Calvin college in the United States, in 1980 and 1997. The second is a reprint of two articles originally published elsewhere in 1993 and 1997, and written by a teacher at Covenant Theological Seminary, also in the United States. The third is a reprint of a work written by the renowned Dutch reformed theologian, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), which was first published in an English translation in Canada in 1980.

The first of Monsma's two papers is entitled 'Biblical Principles for Economic Theory and Practice'. It is brief, just 14 pages, much of it consisting of the extensive quotation of biblical texts that bear on economic issues. The largest section discusses the biblical notion of stewardship, which the author summarises with three principal points: those who have been entrusted with resources have only a

limited right to the personal use of them or their product; they have a duty to use them productively for their family's needs and the needs of those who do not have enough; and society has a responsibility to provide just structures (including property structures), which the author then defines. Monsma also summarises biblical teaching on wealth, the effects of sin on the economic area of life and the impact of redemption. He stresses the fact that 'there can be no religiously neutral area of life. Thus all economic theories and actions are influenced by the faith of the person devising or engaging in them' (p.14). The article is a helpful review and introduction to some key biblical principles, but the analysis is very condensed and does not take the reader very far.

Monsma's second paper, 'Christian Faith and Economic Theorizing', attempts to apply biblical principles to actual economic theory. He starts by affirming, 'There is no area of a Christian's life that is not subject to the Lordship of Christ' (p.15); this must include intellectual activity, and specifically here economic theorizing. This is particularly the case because no area of knowledge is objective and value free: 'plausibility structures' (Newbigin) or 'control beliefs' (Wolterstorff) always shape the way in which we 'know'. For a Christian, the fundamental doctrines of creation, fall, redemption and the second coming should constitute the framework from which all knowledge, including economic theory, is evaluated and constructed. Monsma then applies this approach to the Neo-classical school of economic theory, as the dominant approach in the West and, increasingly, in the rest of the world too. He briefly explains certain key elements of the Neo-classical school and offers a critique from a Christian perspective. In conclusion he suggests that Christian economists should respond to Neo-classical theory in two ways. First, as it is so prevalent it must still be studied and taught, but critically: 'we must evaluate and modify it on the basis of our Christian worldview, and help our students and the Christian community in general to do so also' (p.25). Second, Christian economists should seek to develop a body of economic theory based on a Christian worldview. Monsma recognises that this is not an easy task and that little progress has actually been made, but declares that it is essential if Christians are

to be salt and light in their societies. 'Christian Faith and Economic Theorizing' reminds us that Christians are called to apply their faith in all fields of learning, and it offers an example of how that might happen in one area. It is a vital part of what discipleship means for the student and scholar; the alternative is simply to accept the humanistic and rationalistic consensus that invariably prevails in the academic world.

Williams' first paper is entitled 'Homosexuality, Scripture and the Body of Christ'. The author notes the existence of what he terms 'homosexual hermeneutics' which suggest 'that Scripture is silent on or irrelevant to the issue of homosexuality' (p.1). In response the author argues that the Bible does indeed regard homosexuality as sin, and deals with the various hermeneutical manoeuvres that have been deployed to try and prove the opposite. At the same time, in discussing Romans 1, he points out that part of Paul's purpose is to demonstrate that all are sinners, not just the homosexual, and that all therefore stand equally in need of the grace of God. Thus, while Scripture condemns homosexuality, it does so 'in exactly the same way that it condemns pride, parental disobedience, adultery and gossip' (p.14). The homosexual who belongs to Christ's body 'deserves to be understood, accepted, loved, forgiven, trusted and affirmed' as much as every other Christian.

The second article, 'Homosexuality and the Body of Christ: an Opportunity for Reflection', notes what the author terms 'the homosexual insurgency' in the West and proposes six theses as a Biblical framework within which the current discussion of homosexuality should be conducted. Again, while contending strongly against the homosexual agenda and its supporting arguments, he points out the hypocrisy that may often characterise the opposing side: 'the homosexual movement has raised a stinging moral challenge to the hypocrisy and decadence of our culture' (p.26). He concludes again by insisting on the necessity of demonstrating the grace of God to the homosexual: 'it means supportive and knowledgeable pastoral care for persons seeking to cope with the problem of homosexuality' (p.30).

Bavinck's work comes from an earlier generation which was facing the erosion of faith. However, the problem is of continuing relevance because of the importance of the issues involved: 'when our highest interests, our eternal weal or woe is at stake, we must be satisfied with nothing less than infallible, divine certainty' (p.5). The question, therefore, is where such certainty may be found. Bavinck considers various possibilities, particularly scientific demonstration and personal experience, and points out their inadequacies. Moreover, recognising that the devotees of all religions claim to have certainty, he notes that '... certainty is not the same as truth. Truth always brings certainty, but certainty is not proof of truth' (p.14). He concludes that what is essential for certainty of faith is a word from God himself, whose truth is confirmed to the believer through the work of the Spirit: 'true knowledge of God is possible only through faith, which He himself quickens in our hearts' (p.37). This is not to deny the value of apologetics in evangelism, and the believer must seek grounds to make his faith 'more acceptable to the outsider'. However, 'apologetics is the fruit, never the root, of faith' (p.8), and its arguments are 'often rather flimsy'.

Three implications that Bavinck draws from his analysis of faith are particularly worthy of attention. First, the role of theology must be 'to nurture the certainty of faith': it must be practical. Theology that concerns itself only with critical and historical studies 'is not worthy of the name theology. And a theologian who is acquainted with all the latest issues of his science but who stands speechless at a sickbed and knows no answer to the questions of the lost sinner's heart isn't worthy of his title and office' (p.6). Bavinck's challenge to theology and theologians is just as relevant now as it was when he wrote these words - maybe more so. Second, he criticises approaches to faith which produce a 'narrowness of Christian vision' (p.21), and leave the world untouched. Certain faith should recognize that 'God is the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth', and so should have an impact on the world he has created. The weakness of pietism, Methodism and Moravianism was that 'the earthly terrain of art and science, literature and politics, family and society were not recognised in their full meaning and significance

and were therefore also not reformed and renewed on the basis of Christian principles' (p.21). It is an accent found also in Monsma's insistence, noted above, that Christian economists should be pursuing a Christian economic philosophy. Third, certain faith brings with it its own assurance of salvation. Assurance is 'contained in faith from the outset and in time organically issues from out' (p.40). It does not come from logical reasoning or self-examination.

All three booklets can be warmly commended. It is to be hoped that the Institute for Reformational Studies at Potchefstroomse University will continue to produce such studies. Its publishing initiative constitutes a challenge to other African theological institutions, and to African theologians too.

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Millard J. Erickson
L. Arnold Hustad, ed.
Introducing Christian Doctrine
Grand Rapids, Mich., USA: Baker Academic,
2001 (2nd edition)

In 1983 Millard J. Erickson, then the Professor of Theology at Bethel Theological Seminary, published his landmark theological textbook under the title, *Christian Theology*, an unabridged, one volume edition of 1,300 pages. That book has been widely acclaimed and used as a seminary-level textbook for graduate level study of systematic theology.

Introducing Christian Doctrine, second edition, is an attempt to provide "a briefer version" of that magisterial textbook for use in Bible Colleges and Christian liberal arts colleges. The content of this introductory textbook on Christian doctrine is "entirely" the

work of Erickson, presently the Distinguished Professor of Theology at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary. But the deletion and condensation of *Christian Theology* is the work of L. Arnold Hustad, a former student of Erickson and present Professor of Theology at Crown College in Minnesota. Some portions of the book were re-written by Erickson.

The main outline of this introductory book on Christian doctrine is the same as the original seminary level textbook, Part One to Part Twelve. But the chapters have been reduced from 59 to 42 in order to reduce the size of the book from 1,300 to 415 pages. Advanced topics on philosophical questions or the history of the doctrine have been eliminated. Part One has been rewritten to reduce the content from 133 pages to 22 pages. What remains is a readable presentation of basic Christian theology.

Unlike the seminary-level textbook which only provided a brief outline at the beginning of each chapter, this college-level textbook includes at the beginning of each chapter: chapter objectives, chapter summary, study questions and chapter outline. This book also has a larger font for subheadings and various summary statements set out in larger print.

The theological perspective and much of the content remains the same as the unabridged version. While Erickson describes the various theological positions on a particular issue, he concludes with a presentation of his own theological view.

He holds to a high view of Scripture which is wholly dependable and fully inerrant. His teaching on God, Man, Sin, the Person and Work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, Salvation, the Church and the Last Things are evangelical; that is, faithful to the historic orthodoxy of the Christian Church.

His position on the miraculous gifts today is neither Pentecostal nor cessationist. While open to the possibility of miracles and speaking in tongues, he sees the New Testament church as transitional. What the Book of Acts narrates should not be taken as normative. The emphasis in Scripture is on the One who gives these gifts and not the spiritual gifts themselves.

He is Reformed in his teaching of predestination and perseverance of the saints. He is congregationalist in his teaching

of church government, though he acknowledges that nowhere in the New Testament is there any prescriptive teaching on the kind of church government laid down. His view of baptism is baptistic and his view of the Lord's Supper is Zwinglian, that is, commemorating Christ's death. He comes out in favour of pre-millennialism and the post-tribulation rapture.

Altogether, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* is a worthy book on Christian theology to be made a standard textbook for a Bible School or College course on theology. Its basic nature, however, means that the student who desires something deeper must turn to the original, Erickson's *Christian Theology*.

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Walter A. Elwell ed.

Evangelical Dictionary of Theology

Grand Rapids, Mich., USA: Baker Book House Co.

Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press

2001 (2nd edition)

In 1963 this book reviewer received as an award in seminary the *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, first published in 1960. For twenty years that 566 page dictionary served two generations of theological students.

Then Baker published an enlarged and updated edition, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell. That 1,200 page dictionary was composed of 1,200 entries with 288 contributors. *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, first edition, was written without technical language so that lay people could easily understand. But contributing authors were mostly Ph.D.'s with expertise in their area of contribution. It was an *evangelical* dictionary of theology in that nothing cast doubt on fundamental truth of the Christian faith or the absolute trustworthiness of the Bible. Book reviews were effusive in praise for this "prodigious

and significant work,” “a first class piece of evangelical scholarship,” one that “should be without question on the shelf of every university student, seminarian, and Christian worker.”

Twenty years later it was felt that this pace setting dictionary should be revised and updated in order to address new issues and correct some shortcomings in the older edition. This was “a full blown revision” that took six years of work. The editors deleted 100 articles thought irrelevant and added 215 articles on new theological trends and on living theologians. Many articles were also rewritten or updated. But the editors have retained the one-volume format with 1,300 pages.

A comparison of the second edition with the first is illuminating. Various word studies found in the original dictionary are omitted in the revised edition. Articles on historical personalities are added, including African-Americans and Jewish philosophers. Certain articles are significantly revised such as the ones on Abortion, Ageing and Evolution. A 5 page article on African Theology has been added where none existed in the first edition. We can only lament the loss of the article on Church Growth authored by Donald McGavran, the Father of Church Growth. In its place is a valuable updated critique of the Church Growth Movement by Scott Moreau. But the fact that no article has been included by McGavran or about him is a tragic oversight. The original history of the contributors with names in bold print followed by identification of their place of service is far superior to the revised listing of contributors. In fact, both editions could have been improved by providing an index of the contributors with the articles in the dictionary authored by them.

Apart from the inevitable limitations determined by space constraints, this first class second edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* should be considered an essential part of a reference library for every serious student of the Word of God, in whatever part of the world the person may be. If you are fortunate to own the first edition, it also should be preserved for articles omitted in the second edition.

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Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg
A Global History of Christians
How Everyday Believers
Experienced Their World

Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 1994

Many historical accounts of the church can be dry reading because they often focus on the endless councils, popes, emperors, doctrinal controversies and church divisions.

A Global History of Christians is a 450 page Church History but with a difference. As the subtitle indicates, it emphasises “how everyday believers experienced their world.” As a book on church history should do, it does treat major events, leaders, institutions and theological controversies throughout the 2,000 years of church history. But it emphasises the lives of ordinary Christians by placing them in their cultural setting. Hence, this book is readable and enjoyable for it is church history with a difference.

There are 17 chapters, beginning with “The World of the First Christians” and ending with “The World Since World War II.” Throughout the book there are highlighted boxes with brief treatments of key persons, events and quotations. Many pictures bring further interest. At the end of each chapter there is a selected bibliography for further reference.

The following excerpt from chapter one illustrates the flavour of the book which whetted my appetite.

It is difficult for well-scrubbed twentieth-century American Protestants to imagine visiting a first-century synagogue or church. The most startling difference would have been the odors. Although ritual bathing occurred at intervals, no deodorants or soaps reduced the general funkiness of Eastern Mediterraneans. The warm climate, a diet rich in onions and garlic, infrequent changes of clothes, and the smoke from oil lamps and cooking fires combined to produce an extraordinarily earthy atmosphere wherever people gathered. Add a little incense and breezes

wafting from the dung heap outside town and the aroma would drive modern hygienic Westerners to their knees (not necessarily in prayer).

Throughout the book there are attempts to picture the people in their social and cultural context. Portraying the picture of everyday Christians in the early church, the authors describe Hellenistic lifestyle and philosophies and then add the Roman context to help one understand the world of the apostolic church.

Throughout the book the authors vividly describe in concrete and down-to-earth ways how the Christians responded to their faith in their culture and how they were perceived by non-Christians. For example, the Romans hated the Christians because

Christians appeared to their pagan neighbours as spoilsports. They refused to participate in many of the normal duties and activities of civic life... Christians avoided the arena and condemned others for enjoying the blood-letting. To Romans the arena was the moral equivalent of televised football [American football]...Christians condemned the popular theatre as pornographic (so did some Romans). Most regarded the theatre as light entertainment. Christian attacks on the practice of putting unwanted babies on the refuse heaps challenged the traditional right of the Roman father over his children. For such activity they were regarded as anti-family.

It is indeed a church history book "without peer" which students will find enjoyable to read.

However, the student of history in the third world will be disappointed with the scant treatment of the younger churches. While there are 42 pages on "The Twentieth-Century America", there are only 7 pages on African Christianity after World War II. Furthermore, the vivid descriptions of the cultural and social environment of everyday Christians quoted above from chapter one, does not continue to the same degree throughout the book. But then one could not expect the authors to do so when seeking to compress a history of world Christianity within 450 pages.

We highly recommend this book. It not only represents the best in evangelical Christian scholarship in church history but brings to life the living reality of everyday Christians in a readable and enticing manner. Even though African church history is not

prominent, one can gain keen insights into the ways the social and cultural environment in the past has affected Christianity in different parts of the world, even as culture affects the Christian church in Africa today.

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Michael Green

THE MESSAGE OF MATTHEW

Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000

The publication of *The Message of Matthew* by Michael Green brings to completion the New Testament series of *The Bible Speaks for Today*. It is not itself an entirely new volume, but a revised reissue of Green's *Matthew for Today*, originally published in 1988. It contains 4 pages of bibliography; an introduction discussing the usual questions of author, date, readership and so on; the exposition proper of almost 270 pages; and finally a study guide with questions for individual reflection or group discussion on each section of the text.

The purpose of *The Bible Speaks for Today* series is 'to expound the biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable'. *The Message of Matthew* largely conforms to this pattern. Technical discussions are kept to a minimum, the style is lively and attractive, and the emphasis is on communicating what the text means and how it applies today. It would be accessible not only to people who have some formal theological background, but also to those with a modicum of education who want to understand the Scriptures better.

The structure of the gospel has been much debated, and Green follows the pattern identified in *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel* by E. and I. Billingham (Brechinset Publications, 1982), dividing Matthew into 2 major sections (chapters 1-13 and 14-28), and each of these into 3 subdivisions. However, it is not always obvious that

the structure Green identifies arises naturally from the text itself. The reference on page 34 to 'a particularly subtle link' between sections itself implies that some of the connections and divisions are less than self-evident. Green suggests, as others have before him, that the five main blocks of teaching in the gospel intentionally parallel the five books of Moses, thereby identifying Christ as a second and greater Moses, the mediator of a new and greater covenant. He doubts that Matthew the disciple wrote the gospel, but accepts that he may be the author of one of its sources, perhaps of the supposed sayings collection, 'Q', or of a list of Old Testament messianic prophecies fulfilled in Christ, or of an oral tradition that was subsequently incorporated into the gospel that came to bear his name. He dates the gospel at about 80 a.d., and is frequently concerned in his exposition to relate its message to the supposed concerns of the original readers. He concludes the introduction with a useful brief survey of recent study of the gospel.

The author is well-known as an evangelist and apologist, and this is apparent in this work, as when he defends the historicity of the virgin birth or that of the resurrection. His interpretation shows an occasional charismatic leaning. Thus, he argues that some of the healing stories are intended to encourage disciples to do the same: 'Jesus laid his hand on the woman, and she was healed. And the disciples should do likewise' (p.116). However, he goes on to admit, 'many people are not healed', which leaves a degree of ambiguity: clearly, even in Green's view, the disciple cannot simply 'do likewise'. His defence of infant baptism, which he argues is 'reasonable and in line with the Old Testament recognition of the place of children within the covenant' (p.206), betrays his Anglicanism.

Green does not always provide the detailed help with the text that readers might be looking for. He frequently offers a 'broad brush' approach rather than careful exposition, and long, important passages do not always get the attention they deserve. For example, in pages 82-84 there is a good discussion of the theological significance of the temptations of Jesus, but little detailed exposition of the individual temptations themselves. At times his approach is centred round key themes that he wishes to develop, but

not obviously derived from the priorities of the text itself. So, the discussion of the mission of the disciples highlights certain themes but actually omits discussion of some of the text. Again, in his discussion of Matthew 12 he quite simply skips over some pericopes, presumably to maintain his own predetermined pattern.

Green's exegesis can sometimes be weak. In the course of his discussion of the Sermon on the Mount he discusses the different Greek words that are translated by the one word 'love' (pp.97-98) - *philia*, *eros*, *storge*, *agape*. He claims that *agape* 'was something very different .. [it] means a love that gives itself for the good of the recipient'. However, it has long been recognised that a lexical approach of this nature is flawed. There is indeed something unique about the love of God and that which should characterise his children, but it cannot be associated with just one particular Greek word group. Sometimes Green seems to read more into the text than is there. He claims that Jesus used parables in part because of 'the move from the synagogue to the seashore. As the leaders of the religious establishment turned increasingly against him, we find Jesus moving more and more out into the open air, where the common people heard him gladly. So the teaching in parables comes after widespread rejection of his message and his person by the rulers' (p.153). But is this true? Green does not demonstrate that it is so, and it is not clear that this gospel or any of the others supports it. His discussion on marriage and divorce is good until he claims, when discussing the exception clause in 19:9 ('except for marital unfaithfulness'), 'there is a straight contradiction between Matthew on the one hand and Mark and Luke on the other' (p.204). Such an assertion is, first of all, simply false; the fact that Matthew gives a slightly more nuanced version of the Saviour's teaching than do Mark or Luke, does not mean that there is a contradiction. Secondly, it raises questions about Green's view of the reliability of the gospel as a record of Christ's teaching. He goes on to explain the Matthean exception clause in the following terms: 'here in Matthew we probably see the earliest attempt of the first Christians to be loyal to the thrust of Jesus' teaching but making an exception for a manifestly difficult situation' (p.205). In other words, the phrase, 'except for marital unfaithfulness', came not from Jesus

himself but was added by the church to moderate his teaching. This at once raises the question of how much more of Jesus' teaching as recorded in the gospel might have been added later by the church; it is a dangerous path to go down. Later on he interprets Matthew 27:52-53, the brief reference to the resurrection of 'many holy people who had died', as a 'profound meditation on what the crucifixion of Jesus means for the destiny of humankind' (p.303) rather than an account of actual events.

Some of Green's observations are wrong or gratuitous. He associates the prophecy of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14) with the reign of Hezekiah rather than Ahaz (p.64). He identifies Benjamin as the ancestor of the Messiah (p.73). He claims that when the mother of James and John asked for them to sit at Jesus' right and left in the kingdom, it was 'to their embarrassment' (p.215). He writes that Paul 'probably' found it 'trying' that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection, given that he does not mention them in his account of resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians 15 (p.313). Curiously he refers to the Holy Spirit as 'it' (p.78). More seriously, in his comments on Matthew 16:21, Green's explanation of the necessity of Christ's sufferings is weak, with no clear reference to their primary, propitiatory purpose. Rather he emphasises, first, the need for the Saviour to 'empathise' with suffering humanity, and then refers to 'the need to get to the root of evil in the world' and to 'overcome the deadly disease of human sin and cosmic disorder' (p.182), but with no suggestion as to how Christ's death may have accomplished these objectives. Elsewhere he claims that on the cross Christ was 'fully and *ontologically* [my italics] identified with the sins of humankind' (p.81); but what does that mean?

To conclude, there is much that is good in this book. The author frequently opens up new insights into the text, and equally offers much material to assist the teacher and preacher of the Scriptures with appropriate contemporary application. It can undoubtedly be read with profit. But as a careful exposition it is at times deficient, and some of the weaknesses are serious.

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