

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

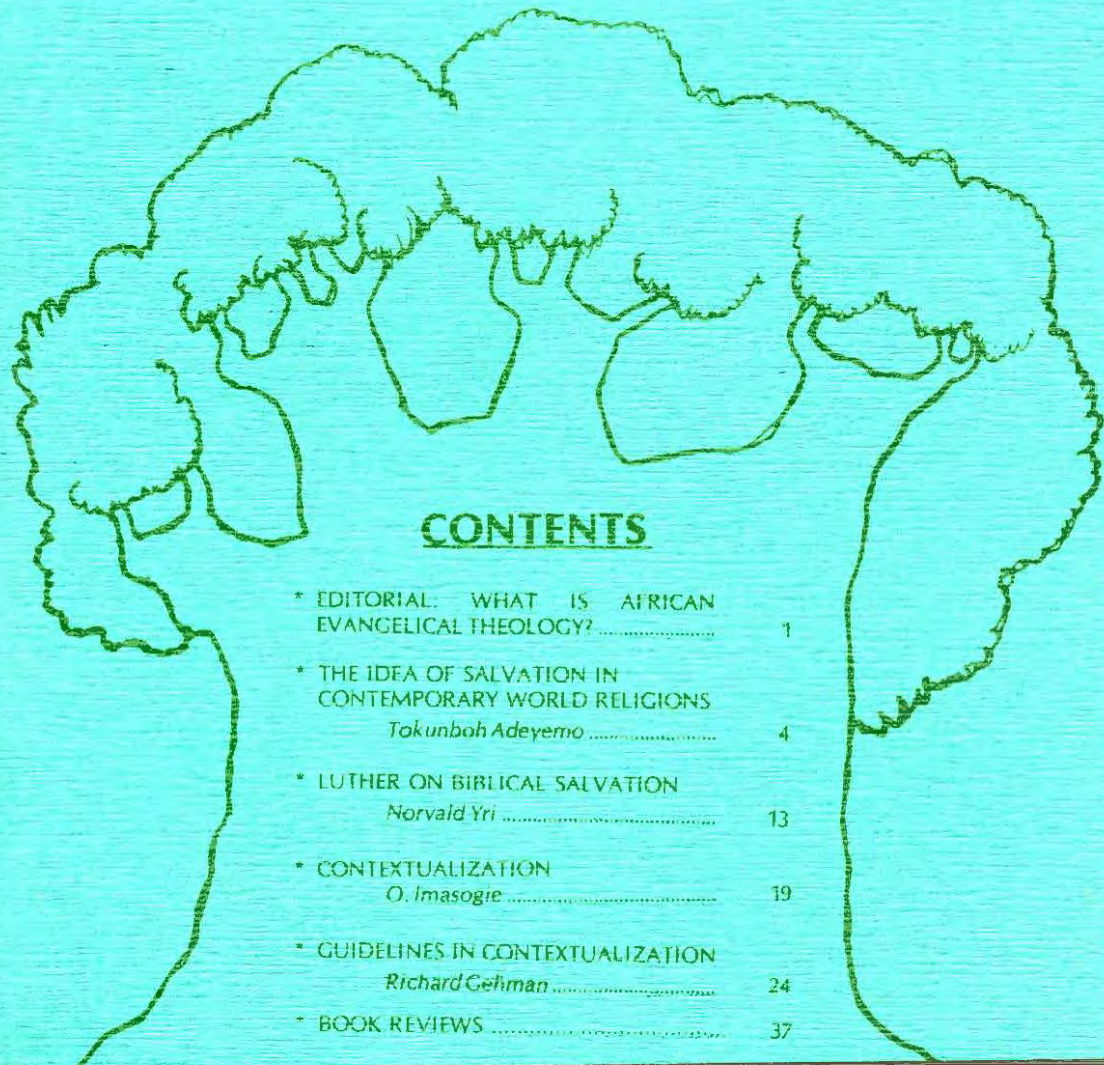
A table of contents for the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ajet-02.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ajet-02.php)

# *east africa journal of evangelical theology*

VOLUME 2

NO. 1 — 1983



## CONTENTS

- \* EDITORIAL: WHAT IS AFRICAN  
EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY? ..... 1
- \* THE IDEA OF SALVATION IN  
CONTEMPORARY WORLD RELIGIONS  
*Tokunboh Adeyemo* ..... 4
- \* LUTHER ON BIBLICAL SALVATION  
*Norvald Yri* ..... 13
- \* CONTEXTUALIZATION  
*O. Imasogie* ..... 19
- \* GUIDELINES IN CONTEXTUALIZATION  
*Richard Gehman* ..... 24
- \* BOOK REVIEWS ..... 37

## THE EAST AFRICA JOURNAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

### General Editor:

Rev. Isaac Simbiri

### Editorial Staff:

Mark Shaw, Robert Cook, William Mull, Angela Godfrey, Lois Shaw,  
Julius Muthengi

### Consulting Editors:

Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo

Rev. Richard Gehman

Dr. Josphat Yego

Rev. Yemi Ladipo

### Purpose:

EAJET is published twice a year by the staff of Scott Theological College in order to provide African evangelical theological students with editorials, articles and book reviews on subjects related to theology and ministry.

### Editorial Policy:

We welcome articles and book reviews from an evangelical perspective. Reviews and articles should be typed on one side only, doubled-spaced with end – notes. Send to:

The Editor

EAJET

Box 49

Machakos

### Subscription Information

Regular rate: U. S. \$ 6.00 or 3.25 Brit. £ or Ksh 60/=

Rate for students studying in Africa: U. S. \$ 4.00 or Brit. £ 2.25  
or Ksh 40/=

Surcharge for airmail in Africa is U. S. \$ 4.00 or £ 2.25

Surcharge for airmail overseas is U. S. \$ 6.00 or £ 3.25

Checks should be made payable to EAJET. Send to Box 49, Machakos, Kenya

### Cover:

The Baobab tree is the EAJET symbol for the gospel in Africa. The good news of Christ, like the baobab tree, is ageless, enduring and firmly rooted in African soil.

## What is African evangelical theology?

His name is Mumo. He is graduating this year from a Bible School somewhere on the continent of Africa. He will be a teacher after he graduates as well as a part-time pastor in a small local church. He will become more deeply involved with the two worlds he loves. His passion for these conflicting worlds is riddled with tension. There is, first of all, the world of Christian faith represented by the Bible he studies, the church where he worships, and a special religious vocabulary filled with words that blaze with personal meaning, words like, "born again," "justified," "Spirit-filled" and above all, "saved."

He was ushered into this new world of faith four or five years ago in a dramatic conversion experience. This is the world of Christ, the gospel, the Spirit. It is a world of light which fills him with great peace and satisfaction. It is a world to which he is intensely committed.

But there is a second world. It is the world of African culture represented by the name he bears, the ancestry to which he belongs, and the headlines of the daily newspaper, alive with political, economic, intellectual and social pulsations. The vocabulary of this world is filled with words like "tradition," "spirits," "development", "poverty", "cultural authenticity", "selfhood" and "non-alignment." He was ushered into this world of culture twenty-five years ago at his birth. It is a world of richness, a black richness, like dark, fertile soil. It is a world to which he is also intensely committed.

Mumo's crisis is the yawning gap between the two worlds he loves. His search is for a theology which bridges the chasm between his Christ and his culture. His search is for an African evangelical theology, a theology which bridges this gap by applying the truths of the world of faith, the lordship of Jesus Christ, as taught in the Scripture, to the world of African culture, issues and problems.

As such, any theology that would claim to be both African and evangelical, that would truly relieve Mumo's tension, should include the following:

### **1. The African evangelical is committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the powers of this world.**

The African evangelical has, as the very heart of his theology, not a theory, abstraction, philosophy or axiom, but a person – the divine-human mediator, Jesus Christ. He rejects all speculative approaches to theology which do not recognize the centrality of Christ. Thus African

evangelical theology can never be merely academic. Its aim is intensely personal – to follow, exalt, serve, worship and proclaim Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

What does someone like Mumo mean when he utters that oldest of Christian confessions – “Christ is Lord”? It includes Christ’s lordship over the power of sin. Only he can take it away. Only he has paid its penalty. It includes Christ’s lordship over the power of evil. No curse, charm, magic or fetish; no corrupt politician, dishonest businessman or false ideology can thwart the power and plan of Christ. Even his enemies unwittingly do his will. He will bring righteousness to triumph in his time and in his way. It includes Christ’s lordship over the power of death. His resurrection proves that new and greater life awaits those who trust him. The African Christian, knowing that he will be guided through death by his powerful Lord faces death honestly, soberly, yet without fear. It includes Christ’s lordship over culture. Christ is Lord over culture – the author of its good; the judge of its evil. For this reason African evangelical theology does not worship African culture, although it appreciates its God-given beauty and richness. Instead the evangelical submits all his culture, even his love of his culture, to Christ for his use, his transformation and his judgment.

## **2. The African evangelical is committed to the Word of God and the Spirit of God as the only reliable guides to understanding the truth about the Lordship of Christ**

While Christ is the center of Christianity, the Bible is the cradle where he is displayed. While Mumo is deeply moved by the traditions of his fathers and the cries of African culture, it is to the Word of God he turns for truth about salvation, man, the world and right living. Why? Because only the Bible gives him the truth about Christ as redeemer and Lord. The African evangelical does not recognize as Saviour the prophetic Christ of the Qu’ran, the hidden Christ of Hinduism, the silent Christ of African tradition, the revolutionary Christ of liberation theology or the middle-class Christ of Western culture. Only the biblical Christ is the object of saving faith. How can Christ be seen clearly in the Scriptures? The African evangelical seeks the illumination of the Spirit (John 16:13). The full dimensions of His power – power sufficient for the needs of Africa – are brought to light only by that supernatural searchlight – the Spirit of God.

## **3. The African evangelical is committed to applying this biblical, Christ-centered faith to life in Africa**

What makes evangelical faith African? The key is the area of application. African evangelical theology is simply evangelical theology applied to the African context. To be authentic Mumo must let Christ and his power

speaking to African questions, issues and needs. What are these needs? African evangelical theologians who helped draft the 1982 Seoul Declaration describe the areas which need application:

Those of us in Africa will have to take seriously the traditional African world view, the reality of the Spirit-world, the competing ideologies, the resurgence of Islam and the contemporary cultural, political and religious struggles. Theology will have to explore ways of presenting the personal God and Jesus Christ as the only mediator between God and man. Also it will seek to respond to the quest for human identity in the context of the dehumanizing history of colonial exploitation, tribal feuds and racial discrimination.

These are the larger questions. But the smaller ones relating to family, marriage, morality, jobs are no less pressing.

If these are the commitments essential to authentic, African evangelical theology, how do we integrate them in such a way that a bridge is built for men like Mumo? **EAJET** is but one of many efforts to build such an integrated faith. Two of our four articles in this issue deal specifically with the theory of contextualization -- applying biblical Christianity to culture. Our two lead articles are case studies in evangelical theology interacting with rival views of salvation, encountered in the African context. Mumo can't live forever caught in the tension between his two worlds. With help his faith and vision will grow. Answers will be found. Bridges will be built.

# THE IDEA OF SALVATION IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD RELIGIONS

Tokunboh Adeyemo

In one form or another, nearly all the world's religions and ideologies promise their adherents some form of peace — some way of deliverance from the precarious plight humanity is in. Hinduism and Buddhism promise **nirvana**, a blessedness through extinction of individuality and desires. In African Traditional Religion, a worshipper believes that through divination and prescribed sacrifices he can be delivered from his enemies, real and potential, secure the help of his ancestors and the gods and be prosperous in life. Islam strongly advocates submission to Allah as the pathway to peace. And modern humanism looks forward to a society freed from all forms of violence — social, cultural, economic or political.

All these goals can be referred to as 'salvation'. Are they all equally valid? If so, how do all these ways of being saved fit alongside Jesus' words: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father, but by me'? Or Peter's declaration: 'There is no other name (besides Jesus Christ) under heaven given to men by which we must be saved'?

There is an important sense in which it can be said that the doctrine of salvation forms the theological watershed between Judeo-Christian faith and all other faiths and ideologies. Even within Christendom as Carl Braaten argued, 'the whole of theology is inherently developed from a soteriological point of view. Salvation is not one of the many topics, along with the doctrine of God, Christ, church, sacraments, eschatology, and the like. It is rather the perspective from which all these subjects are interpreted'.<sup>1</sup> Matters of life and death can be second to none to mortals. And that is what the doctrine of salvation is all about. Any inquiry into it, any investigation or exploration, any argument or debate demands seriousness and intensity.

Two approaches are open to us. We can consider the subject religion by religion such as: idea of Salvation in Hinduism, in Buddhism, in Islam and so on and so forth. Apart from the fact that space will not allow any adequate treatment of each system, salvation features cross and overlap

---

1. Carl E. Braaten, 'The Christian Doctrine of Salvation', *Interpretation* XXXV (1981), p.117.

---

DR. TOKUNBOH ADEYEMO is the General Secretary of THE ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS IN AFRICAN AND MADAGASCAR. This is the first part of a two part series on salvation. It was originally given as a lecture at Scott Theological College in January, 1983.

in the different systems. Therefore, we have opted for the classification approach,<sup>2</sup> which largely follows the flow of history of religion and its repeated pattern.

### **Salvation by Right Ritual**

Going back to the genesis of recorded history of religion known to us, evidences point in the direction that man did not invent, evolve or discover religion. Rather, from the day of his creation he recognised the Creator-God and had fellowship and communion with Him. And when that fellowship and communion was broken as a result of his sin, man sought re-entry and acceptance by means of animal sacrifice.

Genesis 4:4-5 has been variously interpreted by theologians particularly in light of Hebrews 11:4. Taken in its immediate context, the message of Genesis 4 is clear. Abel's faith was authenticated by his obedience of offering animal sacrifice to God which corresponded to what God had done for Adam and Eve as recorded in Genesis 3:21.

After he and his family had been spared in the great universal flood, we read in Genesis 8:20-21 that Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasant aroma and said in his heart: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done'. This practice of building an altar and sacrificing animals to God was neither unknown nor uncommon to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Gen. 12:7,8; 13:4,18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1,3,7). The idea was so familiar that, as a lad, Isaac asked his father: 'Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' (Gen. 22:7). The ritual of animal sacrifice, either to seek God's pleasure as in the case of Abel; or to express gratitude for life preservation as in the case of Noah; or in obedience to direct command from God with consequent blessing as in Abraham's case, has served as a means of salvation.

From the original pattern laid down by God, copies were made by men. And as man drifted away from God, void of any direct communication from God, no prophets and no written scriptures, his religion fell from a lesser degree of degeneration to a greater one even as his mind became futile and his heart got darkened. The corollary to this was the foolishness of exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles (see Rom. 1:21-22). At the

2. The classification approach is used by Robert Brow in his contribution, 'Origins of Religion', in the Lion Handbook on *The World's Religions* (England: Lion Publishing House, 1982), p. 48.



time when the worship of Creator-God had degenerated to the worship of many man-made gods and as people lived in some form of settled conditions, priestcraft became a trade. Its essence is the rise of a group or groups of people who claim to control access to God or the gods and who suggest that the offering of sacrifices is a meritorious act which forces God or the gods to grant favours. Brow states the general conclusion of modern anthropologists in saying that:

The tribes have a memory of a 'high god', a benign creator-father-god, who is no longer worshipped because he is not feared. Instead of offering sacrifice to him, they concern themselves with the pressing problems of how to appease the vicious spirits of the jungle. The threats of the medicine man are more strident than the still, small voice of the father-god.<sup>3</sup>

It can be said that this is where African Traditional Religion is and its idea of salvation as I have discussed elsewhere <sup>4</sup> is ritualistic and utilitarian. Dr. O. Imasogie has come to the same conclusion in his most recent book.<sup>5</sup>

If salvation by right ritual is accepted as the oldest idea of salvation it is only to be expected that ritualistic practice shall be the norm in Hinduism which is the oldest of the living religions. With no founder, no central authority, and no fixed creed, the 563 million Hindus<sup>6</sup> who live mainly in India adhere to **karma-marga** (the Way of Works) for salvation. This is a system of consistent obedience in carrying out ceremonies, sacrifices and pilgrimages to accumulate merit. The Brahmin priesthood in India became hereditary and by 700 B.C. it exercised great power. Brow writes: 'The Brahmins were in charge of all sacrificial duties for which they were paid fees by the people. They were now suggesting that by the right sacrifices, which they alone could offer, they could procure the favours of the god, various temporal blessings, and a good place in heaven. Gods, men, governments, all were under priestly control.'<sup>7</sup>

In passing it can be noted that whenever the priest assumes and exercises absolute control over people's conscience and destiny as in Hinduism of 700 B.C. or Roman Catholicism of the middle ages, religious revolt is what follows. So it was during the sixth-century B.C. seven world

3. *ibid*, p. 31

4. Tokunboh Adeyemo. *Salvation in African Tradition* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1979), pp. 37-39.

5. O. Imasogie. *African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1982), pp. 76ff.

6. See 'Hidden Peoples 1980' chart issued by Marc, a research arm of *World Vision International*.

7. Robert Brow, p. 38.

religions appeared within fifty years of each other and all have continued to this day. These are: Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Vedanta Monism and Taoism.

### **Salvation by Doing What Makes One Happy [Humanist]**

The priest became an intolerable burden to the people. Morality was divorced from religion. People were denied their right. Truth and justice disappeared all in the name of religion. And since it appeared that the gods were allies of the priests, people began to reject the god-idea as they rejected the priest. In India for example, some of the warrior caste became atheists [**charvakas**]. Having rejected God and the gods, some of this Kshatriya caste turned away from Hinduism and started looking to man for salvation. 'Since the only good that man knows is happiness', they reasoned, 'then the highest good (i.e. salvation) is to do what makes one truly happy'.

Two centuries later the Epicureans, disciples of a Greek philosopher, Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) gave the idea a philosophic stance by adding a little logic and an extensive system of physics. They argued:

Since pain is evil, and since religion causes the greatest crimes and worst pains, especially the fear of divine punishment in a life after death, one's first principle must be that nothing ever comes from nothing by divine power. The universe is a collection of atoms and all phenomena are explained by their bumping each other.<sup>8</sup>

The Epicureans explained the world mechanically in order to prove that the gods have nothing to do with it. Salvation is the pursuit of pleasure which is sought through experience. 'More to an Epicurean's taste were good meals, dozing in the sun, while avoiding politics and family life'.<sup>9</sup> This doctrine of salvation became a seed for modern theology of existentialism and atheistic movements though with modifications. When Karl Marx, the father of Communism was asked what his objective in life was, he said: 'To dethrone God and destroy capitalism'.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Tai Solarin, a renowned Nigerian educator and writer categorically denounces the existence of God and seeks salvation in man and hardwork. In his book, *A Message for Young Nigerians*, he says:

God to people of my sort, is a soporific phantom, tossed round by people who have nothing to do, but proffering the belief in God

- 
8. Gordon H. Clark, "Greek Ethics", *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Canon Press, 1973), p. 277
  9. *ibid*, Apostle Paul was confronted while at Athens by certain Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers (Acts 17:16ff).
  10. William Steuart-McBirnie. *Karl Marx* (Glendale: Voice of Americanism, n.d.), p.3.

to tantalize the working hours of such other millions of people who, too, have nothing to do. I am a humanist. Man is the noblest of all living things. I live to serve him totally, particularly the human child, and die in his service.<sup>11</sup>

These two contemporary examples are cited to indicate that the idea of man seeking salvation from within himself is neither recent nor dead. In fact it is on the increase among our disillusioned intellectuals. Some call it 'political salvation', or 'scientific socialism' and the like.

### **Salvation by Losing all Desire**

Siddhartha Gautama, who later became known as Buddha upon founding Buddhism, was a prince of the second or warrior caste in India. Tradition has it that at the age of 29 he was shocked into seeking the meaning of life, the answer to the problem of sin and suffering, by the sight of a leper, an old man and a corpse. Initially a Hindu, he rejected priestcraft, the gods and sacrifices as a solution. He tried unsuccessfully the way of philosophical speculation before undertaking the path of extreme bodily asceticism. That also didn't work. At 35, while seated under the bo tree in meditation, he experienced enlightenment and thus became the Buddha, the enlightened one.

His interpretation of life and meaning was simple and down to earth. Owing to the law of **Karma**, or cause and effect, mankind is in bondage and through rebirth or reincarnation all human beings reap good or evil consequences of their actions. Through enlightenment and obedience to the right conditions it is possible to liberate man from karma and lead him to salvation, that is **nirvana**. Buddha promulgated the Four Noble Truths and the Noble eightfold path to freedom.

#### **The Four Noble Truths**

1. The first truth is the knowledge of suffering. It states that all individual existence is miserable and painful — birth, aging, illness, worry, pain, despair, distress.
2. The second truth is that the cause of all suffering and unhappiness is desire and ignorance — the desire to be, to have, to indulge oneself in lust and power etc.
3. The third truth is that suffering can be destroyed by suppressing desire. The central aim of Buddhism is to give eternal release from suffering. This means freedom from the endless cycle of rebirth and entering the blessed state of **nirvana**.
4. The fourth truth indicates the way to the third i.e. removal of suffering, and this is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path:

11. Tai Solarin. *A Message for Young Nigerians* (Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Pub. Ltd. 1981), p. 91.

## **The Eightfold Path**

1. Right knowledge or understanding which refers to the Four Noble Truths.
2. Right attitude or intention — a mental attitude of goodwill, peaceableness, keeping away from sensual desire, hate and malice.
2. Right speech — wise, truthful and reconciliatory. No lying, useless chatter and gossip.
4. Right action — embracing all moral behaviour. No murder, stealing and adultery.
5. Right occupation -- no exploitation.
6. Right effort or self-discipline. Evil impulses must be prevented and good ones fostered.
7. Right mindfulness or awareness or self-mastery, not giving in to the dictates of desire in thought, speech, action and emotion.
8. Right composure is achieved by intense concentration which frees the holy man from all that holds him back in his quest.

The Eightfold Path can be condensed into three: morality (right speech, action, occupation); spirituality (right effort, mindfulness, composure); and insight (right knowledge and attitude). No doctrine of a personal God is found. All that is wrong lies with man and man has the solution.

Monasticism, though distinct at different points, shares in this fundamental principle of attaining salvation by losing all desire.

### **Salvation by Right Actions [Moralism]**

The main distinction between a humanist, who sees salvation in doing what brings happiness and a moralist, who conceives of salvation in right actions is that the moralist allows the possibility of the existence of God though he also doesn't seek salvation from God or gods.

The earliest religious expression of the idea of salvation by morality purely by personal effort was also in India. It was started by Vardhamana, a contemporary of Buddha (599-527 B.C.), who later became Mahavira (great hero) or Jain (the Victor) following his enlightenment. He was also from the second caste. Like Buddha, he also reacted against priestcraft, the sacrifices and even God. He rejected prayer and worship as unnecessary. His thought was that good is always rewarded and evil punished. Therefore, salvation could be attained not only by destroying evil but by doing good. His religion became known as Jainism.

He taught that no injury should be done to any animal life. This gave birth to vegetarianism. His goal of salvation is the highest heaven where the soul dwells in eternal and conscious individuality.

If the respect for animal life is omitted from Jainism, one will discover that Jainism is similar to what Zoroaster in Persia had preached before, and what

Confucius was preaching in China at the time of Mahavira in India (551-479 B.C.). The three were first and foremost preachers of ethics.

And down through the ages the world has known moralists or ethicists who believe that salvation is possible simply by doing what is right and good quite apart from any doctrine of God. In this class we can include Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), the Stoics of Greece, the high-principled Chinese, Roman and English 'gentlemen', the modern humanist and many liberal Jews.<sup>12</sup>

### **Salvation by Union with the Absolute**

This idea originally emerged from Hinduism in an attempt partly to give philosophical stance to the ancient priestcraft and partly to arrest those systems which have broken away from it. The teaching advocates that there is only one ultimate substance or principle or Reality called **Brahma**. Union with that Reality is salvation. And this can be achieved through philosophical speculation and meditation known as **Yoga**. Yoga is a Sanskrit word for 'yoke' a union of oneself with Brahma, the ultimate Reality, to the point of oneness. Yoga is a mystic and ascetic discipline by which one seeks to achieve liberation (i.e. salvation) of the self and union with the supreme spirit or universal soul through intense concentration, deep meditation, and practices involving prescribed postures, controlled breathing, etc.<sup>13</sup>

In this religious system called Monism (which is Reformed Hinduism); gods, priests and sacrifices are not banished as in Buddhism. Rather, the sacrifices are spiritualised and God is given a new meaning. He is no longer a theistic Creator but a pantheistic absolute or what Tillich called 'the ground of all being'.

Monism has taken different forms in different places and at different times. In China, a Chinese teacher Lao-Tse, (604-517 B.C.), a contemporary of Confucius, taught and strongly advocated a return to the simplicity of nature, a quiet and personal search for the **Tao**, the eternal, impersonal, mystical supreme principle that lies behind the universe. Instead of a stress on meditation, it was more a seeking to be natural (in dress, food, ways of life), or at one with the course of nature. From this thought, Taoism, one of the three recognized official religions of pre-Communist China, evolved.

In our day many of the sects like Christian Science, Unity Church and cults like Hare Krishna, and Transcendental Meditation have their roots in Monism and share its idea of salvation.

### **Salvation by submission**

The idea of salvation by submission can also be described as salvation by strict adherence to law, or salvation by faith and works. In this system which

---

12. Brow p. 44

13. Webster's New World Dictionary, Second College Edition, 'Yoga', p. 1649.

is found in theistic religions, salvation take the form of cooperation between God and man.

Judaism is the oldest form of salvation by keeping the law in sincerity. The commandments of the written law which have been expanded to 613 precepts of which 365 are negative, stipulate what to do to obtain blessings from God, and things to avoid curses. Practice of the law is more important than belief. Salvation in Judaism is primarily social and corporate, and includes every aspect of life. It pertains to material prosperity, justice and continued historical existence of the people of Israel more than anything else.

Islam, which means 'peace' shares a lot in common with Judaism, more than is often realised. A muslim is one who submits to the will of the one and only God called Allah. For salvation, which is interpreted largely in material terms, Islam demands **Iman**, that is belief in the articles of faith; and **Din**, which is the practice of religious duties or the five pillars of faith. When a muslim complies with this demand he can legitimately expect rewards from God.

Essentiality, the Roman Catholic theology of salvation fits into this category. While it is held that the atonement of Jesus Christ is efficient for salvation, it is not sufficient. Therefore, the faithful has to make penance, confession, seek absolution and purchase indulgences. This was the interpretation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* formula, meaning that outside the Church there is no salvation. Even with new theological interpretation being given to this formular since Vatican II, the notion of salvation by cooperation still persists.

### **Salvation by Grace through Faith alone**

As demonstrated above, the world to which Jesus Christ came was rich in religions, in philosophical ideas, in rules and regulations and in humanistic efforts to give meaning to existence. But Jesus did not come to offer a religion, an idea, a law or a formula about reality. Rather, by his coming, he put an end to rituals and religions. He fulfilled the law in himself. He unveiled the personal Creator-God. He offered life. By a life of sinless obedience, he manifested the highest degree of morality and ethics. By his acts of mercy and compassion, he demonstrated the love of God. His teaching about what is right, good and just has never been paralleled. He met the quest of philosophers concerning reality and truth. He lifted-up the poor; released the oppressed; healed the broken-hearted; set the captives free; fed the hungry; raised the dead; opened blind eyes; and proclaimed the good news of God's Kingdom. Above all, he suffered and died on the cross in the place of all sinners — not for any crime he had committed, but to pacify the wrath of God. He died so as to reconcile man to God! And he rose again so that justified man may be able to live by the power that raised Christ from the dead.

This is salvation in the New Testament. It is a restoration of that original relationship, fellowship and communion with the living personal Creator-Father God. It is holistic: body, mind, soul and spirit. It is both vertical and horizontal. The one who is reconciled with God is sent to his world, to his neighbour and to his community to live-out a righteous, holy and just life in the power of the Holy Spirit. All of this is by God's grace, totally unmerited, unearnable and undeserved. Christ has finished it, all that man does is to believe — and even faith is a gift from God. Salvation by grace is not man trying to reach God; but God reaching down and out to man. It is full and free.

# LUTHER ON BIBLICAL SALVATION: THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY IN HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

Norvald Yri

This year the world protestant community celebrates the 500th Anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther, the great sixteenth century reformer and champion of justification by faith in Christ alone. Few individuals in history have had such a profound impact on the church's understanding of the gospel. As we think of the significance of Luther today, it is appropriate to ask, particularly here in Africa, whether Luther's understanding of salvation is still relevant.

Some recent voices, claiming to speak for African Christianity, have rejected Luther's view of salvation by faith in Christ alone. In a recent article Samuel G. Kibicho claims that there is salvation outside of Christ through African Traditional Religion.<sup>1</sup> Kibicho, in his article states categorically that "there is full and fully saving revelation in African Religion and in other genuine non-Christian religions and independently of Jesus. Kibicho defines this salvation in terms of fruit of the Spirit, a Spirit present in African religious communities of faith as well as in Christ. Further definition of this salvation includes: love, hope, reverence for life, generosity, courage to be human and to fight against all forces both human and super-human which threatened and endangered human survival and well being.

Characterizing various Christian views of revelation, Kibicho is right in pointing out one (the classical Lutheran) that holds the view that special revelation is given in the Holy Scriptures-culminating in the incarnation of God's Son, Jesus Christ. But Kibicho regrets also this classical Christian position, and he calls for radical re-interpretation of the Christian idea of revelation in such a way that we will agree to "full and fully saving revelation in African Religion and in other genuine non-Christian religions — also independently of Jesus ..."

Kibicho is obviously able to reach such a conclusion because he is defining salvation in terms of "human community of faith." Faith, love and hope in their general secular and religious meanings are of course not denied

---

1. Dr. Samuel G. Kibicho, the Department of Religious studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya. See art. In *Africa Theological Journal* Vol. 10 No. 3 pp. 29-37: "The Teaching of African Religion in our Schools and Colleges and the Christian attitude towards this Religion."

---

DR. NORVALD YRI is a lecturer at the LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE in Makumira, Tanzania.



within Christianity. However, Kibicho tends to equate these evidences of faith in human society with the Christian revelation of salvation. And he is doing this without having discussed the Christian hermeneutic as it in particular relates to the understanding of salvation. He is advocating that there is no fundamental and actual difference between salvation in Biblical-Christian terms and salvation in terms of genuine non-Christian religions.

But this is the crucial issue, which I believe it is urgent to discuss. As we do so it will become evident that Christianity claims an understanding of salvation that is different from other religious or secular thought - systems of salvation. The hermeneutics of Martin Luther were not new-they were more a re-statement of a system of hermeneutics that was advocated by Christian Scripture itself, as Luther understood it.<sup>2</sup>

### **Luther's Discovery of the Gospel**

The central question for Luther was simply, how is it possible to have a gracious God? How is it possible for me, a man, by nature an enemy of God to be accepted by him the holy and true God. Luther was a monk in a Church that gave him the following answer: Grace is available for the one who is doing his best. If man is doing his part then God is not unreasonable. But you will never know for sure whether or not you have contributed sufficiently to your salvation.<sup>3</sup>

We have to remember the ecclesiastical context Luther was born into. He was given an understanding of salvation that said "yes" to what God was doing in Christ according to Scripture. However, there was also a "yes" to what God might add of truth through the theological reflections of the Fathers **in addition to** the canonical Scriptures.

For example the perception of Mary without sin and her bodily ascension are dogmas in the Catholic Church today, not based upon "Scripture" but upon "the Fathers."<sup>4</sup>

2. In explaining why God does not carry out his work in men without the word, Luther says that although he could do it without the word, he does not wish to do so. If God would speak without means, as the spiritualists thought he could and if the Spirit were free from the word, he could inspire anything that one might think of. This would mean that some way of salvation other than the gospel of Jesus Christ would have been opened and that God would encounter sinful humanity in some other way than through the humanity and historicity of Jesus to which the word witnesses. But there are no new revelations. Luther's Werke (Weimar, 1883-) Vol. 18, p. 695. Hereafter **WA**, see elaboration in Paul Althaus: **The theology of Martin Luther** (Philadelphia).

See also the Smalcald Articles, WA 245 and The Book of Concord 312 where Luther's view is obvious: No salvation is given except through the external word.

3. The dialogue between Cajetan and Luther 1518, see also M. Chemnitz *Examen Concilii Tridentine* 1565-73, Eng. transl. pp. 465-538.

4. Vatican Council II (1962-65) pp. 60-69.

In fact, Mary and saints are called upon in the Roman Catholic Church in addition to Christ. Mary is called mediatrix (fem. form of mediator, a term applied to Christ), and thus characterized as standing between the people and God.<sup>5</sup>

It is impossible to understand the hermeneutics of Luther without being aware of the ecclesiastical context into which he spoke. There existed a hope in man's own efforts — in his own piety — subject to the help of God's grace. The generally accepted theology was saying that God's grace is a power that is able to change sinful man. "Justification" was being used in the meaning of a healing process started off by the grace, and the "gospel" was and is in Roman Catholic official teaching a message that God receives the one who has that righteousness that is being created within man by God's grace. A man is supposed to grow in love of God and good works and thus do his part, then God will look with favour upon the man and his efforts. On this background we understand that terms like gospel and righteousness were frightening words for the honest monk, Luther.

The gospel required faith and love of God in order to be accepted by him. And Luther had been taught that "the righteousness of God" is righteousness by which the righteous God punishes the sinner and the unrighteous. Luther was doing his best in prayer, fasting and studying ... trying to love God and to change his sinful motives. However, Luther discovered that he hated God — and he was far from sure of his own godliness; his conscience was bothered in front of the holy God.

How, then, was Luther brought out of this spiritual slavery into a new world of freedom and spiritual power? It was by a discovery of the central Christian teaching. A new hermeneutical world opened itself up for Luther in such a way that he was led to see and understand God's revelation in Scripture and the meaning of salvation in the history of salvation. In this context did he discover that he had a wrong understanding of the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:17). Studying the letter to the Romans day and night Luther little by little discovered right context of God's righteousness.

It is not God's punishing righteousness demanding righteousness from man himself in front of God. No, God's righteousness is that which he gives. Luther re-discovered that the one who is righteous by faith — without works — he shall live, i.e. be accepted by the holy God.

He found that the gospel is not another requirement — more heavy than the law — the gospel is the proclamation of God's grace based upon the ministry and the person, Jesus Christ. And in this gospel — God is making

---

5. Vatican Council II, p. 62

known his righteousness, not because of man's works, but because God himself has finished everything for our salvation in Christ. In other words: salvation in terms of God accepting the lost sinner in front of himself — is based solely upon a righteousness that is outside of man himself, it is "alien" in the sense that it is God's righteousness given in Christ.<sup>6</sup>

By faith, in Christ the sinner receives God's grace for the sake of Jesus Christ who died in the place of the sinner — and who rose again. Luther re-discovered that man's own attempts to bring in salvation in terms of righteousness in front of God cannot but fail — regardless of whether these attempts are based upon religious systems within or outside the church. He had discovered that the law — in all its various requirements and forms — is different from the gospel. In this context the law only shows man that he is lost and unable to contribute to his own salvation in front of God. The gospel, on the other hand, is not a requirement, it is a gift, it gives and it forgives. By the gospel the true faith is being created because this faith takes hold of "God's Lamb", Jesus Christ who carried all the sin of the world, atoned for all the sin and guilt in front of God and thus brought salvation.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, Luther had not discovered a new system of hermeneutics, but he had re-discovered the classical hermeneutics based in the Holy scripture itself. And the understanding of justification, then, as not as such a healing process but as an act of judgment, was found to be the self-testimony of God's special revelation. God himself passes the sentence saying that the guilty, the ungodly, the lost sinner is righteous because of Jesus Christ. The faith makes righteous because it seizes and possesses this treasure — the Christ who is present.<sup>8</sup>

This is the basic issue in the Christian understanding of salvation, and this has been a basic doctrine in the Protestant churches down through the ages. Salvation is not found partly or fully outside of Christ — it is not

---

6. Luther has told about this experience several places in his writings perhaps most extensively in the prologue to the collected writings in 1945 in Latin. (Comp, the Smalcald Articles, WA 50,199BC292, also WA 40111335,352 Cf. WA 39,1205 WA 25,330) Luther says that nothing in the article of justification can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed ... on this article rests all that we teach and practice against pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and our adversaries will gain the victory ... The doctrine of justification is the summary of Christian doctrine. It is the unique possession of Christianity and distinguishes our religion from all others. The doctrine of justification preserves the church. If we lose this doctrine, we also lose Christ and the Church ...

7. See Luther 1518. The 95 theses of 1517, in part, th, 62, see ref to Rom 4:15 and 7:5 and 13 and 1 Cor 1:30 (Christ is our righteousness).

8. See all through Luther's Commentary to the Galatians, 1531, faith is grasping [*fides apprehensiva*], and power, WA 391 II.

found independently of the message related to what God has finished in Jesus Christ — independently of all religious efforts of man to justify himself. In fact, no religion tells us what God himself has done in order to save lost man. But God revealed to “prophets and apostles” how he was going to save us. The Christian Church has this prophetic and apostolic word in Holy Scripture. Also Luther emphasized this fact very strongly, it is only from Scripture we get to know the saving message about forgiveness of sins by faith for the sake of Christ. This testimony is evident in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.<sup>9</sup>

The reformation theologians used the expression: *notae exclusivae*: the signs that exclude everything else: Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone [*Sola Scriptura, solus Christus, sola fide.*] There is no certainty of salvation where anything is placed beside Scripture, Christ and faith in him. As Luther says in a sermon from 1519: Certainty of salvation comes from Scripture, a certainty related to forgiveness of all sins by trusting Christ. This is the background for understanding why it was impossible for Luther and later for Protestant churches — to accept the authority of “Tradition” and pope on a level with Holy Scripture. *Sola Scriptura* and salvation in Christ only, hang together. The Roman Catholic Church on the other hand teaches that the church does not have its certainty concerning the revelation of Christian teaching from Scripture only.

#### CONCLUSION:

It seems timely that Protestant Christianity again be reminded about the implications of the Protestant *notae exclusivae* Scripture should be studied again and again — and we should be concerned to use all available tools for going deeper into its meaning. But our various methods and philosophies should not be regarded as of higher authority than Scripture concerning what it teaches about salvation. The modern ecumenical struggles have shown that a broader base for “unity” that even tends to mean “unity of mankind” — also tends to play down the outstanding importance of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

A systems of hermeneutics that in principle accepts salvation independently of the Christian message will of course be free to postulate any theory as a valid definition of salvation, whether in general secular or religious terminology. Then the Christian means of God’s grace — God’s Word, Baptism and Holy Communion will have no conclusive value. One thing is obvious: the dividing line between different systems of

---

9. Smalcald Articles Art II 1537 and Luther resolutions 1518.

10. Denzinger: *Enchiridion* [1854] 1963 and Vat C.II: *De divine revelation* (Revelation of God).

11. I have discussed this development at length. See Novarld Yri: *Quest for Authority: An Investigation of the Quest for Authority within the Ecumenical Movement, 1910 until 1975, and the Evangelical response*, (EPH, Nairobi,) esp. p. 195 ff. comp. The Bible WCC FO pp. 99,81.

hermeneutics is not a geographical line between Europe and Africa. In fact, the time is past when one can divide Western Christianity and African in this way.<sup>12</sup>

The classical Christian view of salvation, then, is that this is not found independently of Jesus Christ. And faith in Christian terms is faith in Jesus Christ as this is created by the Christian message. This attitude is not a Western imperialistic or discriminating attitude. This is what is being understood from God's special revelation in the Judeo-Christian context and culture — a culture that is much 'closer to African *milieu* than European. Man's existential situation as separated from his Creator makes all religious attempts to create his own salvation hopeless. Man had been deprived of his glory in front of the holy God. All "seeking of god" is eventually turned into "mis-seeking" or self-seeking. This is the message Luther rediscovered five centuries ago. It is a message Africa needs to discover now, more than ever.

---

12. See from the African viewpoints: Byang H. Kato: *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975) and Tokunboh Adeyemo: *Salvation in African Tradition* (1979), both EPH, Nairobi. African traditional religious worshippers may claim that their gods are agents of the triune God, Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. But their view must be subjected under the searchlight of the Word of God — Jesus Christ alone will stand tall and unique above all other religions (Kato: 122-124).

# CONTEXTUALIZATION: CONSTRUCTIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CULTURE, PEOPLE, CHURCH, AND THE THEOLOGICAL PROGRAMME

O. Imasogie

## INTRODUCTION:

The question of contextualization must crop up whenever one religion is introduced to a people whose culture differs from that of the one who brings the religion. It is surprising that until recently no major Christian denomination in Africa made any serious effort to address itself to the problem.

There is no intention here to present an exhaustive treatment of the subject. I only want to describe the problem and the need for theological educators to come to grips with it in their curriculum revision. I will then suggest some guidelines that may be considered in the process of contextualization.

### 1. **Contextualization: What it is**

As I was preparing this paper I asked my faculty, especially the new missionary teachers, to let me have the benefit of their efforts at contextualization in the teaching process. I got some interesting responses. One of them in a two-page monograph defined his understanding of contextualization as a process "whereby concepts are translated from one cultural setting to another without loss of essential meanings and also whereby the application of these concepts can be demonstrated in a new setting." He went on to add: "A distinction needs to be made between bridging cultural gaps on the one hand and what we call simple accommodation to another culture. Decisions need to be made between essential, unchangeable elements in concepts and what is less essential and therefore can be changed. An example of the latter in religious context would be that the church formats can change. The former would require that the Christian God cannot simply be identified with Zeus without regard to His essential nature

---

DR. O. IMASOGIE is *Principal of the NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE. He is the author of AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION published in 1982 by the Ibadan University Press.*

and attributes. One has to decide what can and what cannot be changed, what can be identified with another culture and what must be filled with an entirely new meaning." (Charles Egedy)

I must confess that I find it impossible to improve on that definition. For the purpose of our discussion here let us look at contextualization as a process of systematic presentation of the Christian faith that is informed by a serious and critical consideration of the culture of a people and the world view that fashions that culture.

This is presupposed on the assumption that man's apprehension of Christ is greatly influenced by his total experience and needs as perceived through the spectacles provided by his culture. The importance of this view is underscored by the fact that no religion can be considered valid if it does not meet the total needs of a person as perceived by that person. In other words, if Christ is to be the Lord of a particular people, the Word must become flesh anew in the culture and the concomitant thought-pattern of the particular people; otherwise Christianity remains a foreign religion transplanted on a foreign soil. In that case, Santayana's maxim that "any attempt to speak without speaking any particular language is no more hopeless than the attempt to have a religion that shall be no religion in particular" becomes true.

On the surface it would appear that one is belabouring the obvious but that is far from the truth. The truth is that many Christian theologians or educators are not usually aware of the subtle influences that determine their theological formulations and theological educational programmes. No one theologizes in a vacuum. Whether the theologian is aware or not there are certain **givens** which condition his theological activities and thought. Among these are; 1) His existential experience of Christ, 2) his church tradition; 3) his own imaginative insights; 4) his intuitive reactions to the ideas of others; 5) his self-understanding within his world view and 6) his cultural background which provides the thought-pattern, the perspective from which he experiences reality and the language in which he expresses himself. Unfortunately, most theologians have not been acutely conscious of these hidden factors in their theologizing. The result is that there has been a confusion or an equation of Christian faith with the cultural hue or form in which it is presented. This can only lead to superficial commitment on the part of the average people the missionaries try to evangelize. Such a veneer of Christianity invariably peels off under stress and the faith based on it

crumbles because it has not taken root in the total life of the convert involved.

One may wonder why this is the case. The reason is that by ignoring his world-view and self-understanding, the African Christian convert is not given the opportunity to confront his self-understanding with the claims of Christ. Consequently, the average African Christian is a man of two faiths. When faced with existential crises a conflict invariably develops as to the relevance of his Christian faith to what he perceives as a metaphysical problem.

He usually resolves the conflict in favour of his traditional religious practices for coping with such life problems. His unconscious rationale for opting for an unchristian solution is that the "Christian God" must not be familiar with this type of problem; otherwise his pastor or missionary would have taught him something about this.

It is sad to note that the mainstream Christian denominations in Africa have not made any tangibly serious attempt to come to grips with this problem of contextualization. The so-called Independent Churches that have sprung up from the mainstream Christian groups have done so in protest and, in most cases, by people of questionable character and limited Christian theological understanding. The result is syncretism because they are unable to carry out a proper contextualization that does not violate the core of Christian faith.

This is where we must come in as theological educators to take the lead in contextualizing Christianity in Africa. If it is to be done right it must be done by people with an acceptable measure of theological understanding that grows out of existential experience with the living Lord. It may be in order to remind ourselves that what we are called upon to do is not new in Christian history; what is strange is that we did not start earlier than this. Much of the history of Christian doctrine is a commentary on the struggle between Jewish thought-patterns and the Greek world view, vis-a-vis the existential apprehension of Christ within the two thought-patterns. As John Cobb puts it:

In the long run it was Greek and not Jewish Christianity that triumphed; hence it was the problems of relating Greek thought to Christian faith that determined much of the intellectual history of Christianity.

Of course, by "triumph" here, Cobb means the basic formulation of the Christian faith. This must be because in terms of detail the Eastern Orthodox



Christianity is different from the Western version of Christianity. Within the Western sector, the Roman Catholic expression of it differs from the Protestant's. In the same way, within each of these groups the theology of one specific confession, say, in Germany, is different from the same confession on the other side of the Atlantic ocean. In other words, the Word must always become flesh in a particular culture before His glory can be recognized existentially as the glory "as befits the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 NEB).

## **II Suggested Guidelines for Contextualizing Theological Educational Programme.**

I confess that I have neither the intention nor the expertise to tell you how to contextualize your theological educational curriculum. All I can do, having described my understanding of it, is to urge you to make a serious attempt to do it. To this end, I would like to suggest some guidelines which, I believe, are essential points for consideration in any meaningful effort at contextualization that is both Christian and Biblical. These are:

1. An existential conviction that the Gospel of the Incarnate Son of God has eternal saving efficacy for man everywhere and in all generations who, in repentant faith, is committed to Him.
2. A conviction that man's spiritual needs which are essentially universal are perceived through the spectacles of cultural colouring.
3. A recognition of the fact that every man's apprehension of Christ as God's answer to human needs is crucially influenced by his culture. This creates the need to overhaul the current theological curriculum which was devised in a different culture to meet specific needs as perceived there. This is necessary if theological education is to equip the minister for meeting the total needs of his people in their cultural setting. Overhauling does not necessarily mean that the existing curriculum will be discarded. Some elements are basic and must be retained, but this will be done because they are found to be universally relevant following an objective evaluation.
4. A realization that a theological curriculum that is relevant must include an in-depth study of the African world view, his self-understanding and the resultant traditional religions. Such an exercise will afford the minister an opportunity to sit where his people sit in order to see life through their eyes and thus be able to identify their deep spiritual needs which only Christ can satisfy.

With the foregoing, the Christian theologian is ready to begin a meaningful contextualization of the theological curriculum that will become relevant because it has grown out of the world view, culture and thought-pattern of the African as viewed from the perspective of Biblical Christianity. The theological educator must never lose sight of the fact that his main function is to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry." This the saints do by mediating the saving knowledge of Christ to men in their particular total environment. Unless the Gospel is so contextualized the people may not give an existential response to the Christ who came that men may have life and to have it more abundantly.

If this is our task, then we must resist the temptation to defend the status quo. We must be open and re-examine our present curriculum, delete, add and modify as needed in the light of the result of the findings from our objective studies.

# GUIDELINES IN CONTEXTUALIZATION

Richard J. Gehman

Contextualization! A crown jewel in the hands of the missiologist? Or is contextualization fool's gold which has the appearance of value but brings disappointment to the prospector?

Contextualization is many things to many people.<sup>1</sup> For some, contextualization brings new hope of liberation from the tyranny of theological imperialism. The Theological Education Fund sees contextualization as the answer to renewal. "It may be stated that contextualization should be in the focal concern because *through it alone* (italics mine) will come reform and renewal. Contextualization of the Gospel is a missiological necessity."<sup>2</sup>

For others the term, "contextualization," is so loaded with nuances that evangelicals should best avoid it. Fleming concludes his study of contextualization with this recommendation: "Properly speaking, evangelicals do not, and should not, contextualize the Gospel."<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. A selected bibliography of articles on contextualization, not including those referred to in the footnotes, include:
    - Ada, Samuel. "In Dialogue: Reflection on Von Allmen's Article, 'the Birth of Theology'", *International Review of Missions*, January 1975, pages 52-55
    - Buswell, J. Oliver III. "Contextualization: Is it only a New Word For Indigenization?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1978, pages 13-20
    - Conn, Harvie. "Contextualization: A New Dimension," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1978, pages 39-46
    - Conn, Harvie, "Theological Trends and Issues in Christian World Missions as Seen From a North American Perspective," *Occasional Bulletin*, April 1979, pages 53-57
    - Kinsler, F. Ross. "Mission and Context: The Current Debate About Contextualization," *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, January 1978, pages 23-29.
    - Kraft, Charles, "Contextualization of Theology," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January, 1978, pages 31-36
    - Taber, Charles R. "Contextualization: Indigenization and or Transformation," Colorado Springs, Colorado: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, The North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization, October 15-21, 1978.
    - Taber, Charles R. "Is There More than One Way to do Theology?" *Gospel in Context*, January 1978, pages 4-10.
  2. ShokiCoe and Aharon Sapsezian, *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund* (London: Theological Education Fund, WCC, 1972), P. 30
  3. Bruce Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980), p. 78
- 

RICHARD GEHMAN is a lecturer at SCOTT COLLEGE and a consulting editor of *EAJET*.

As J. Oliver Buswell III points out, contextualization is used with various meanings in different contexts without any attempt to define what is meant.<sup>4</sup> Some define contextualization with primary reference to the communicating of the Gospel. The late Dr. Byang Kato in his report at Lausanne said, "We understand the term to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation .... Since the Gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of modes of expression is not only right but necessary."<sup>5</sup>

Others focus their attention on the development of Third World theologies. Daniel von Allmen, representative of many, "attributes the 'new terminology' to 'specialists in theological teaching in the Third World' ".<sup>6</sup> For him, contextualization "is an attempt to express the fact that the situation of theology in a process of self-adaptation to a new or changing context is the same in Europe as in Asia or in Africa."<sup>7</sup>

The author has been interested in the subject for some time. One of the requirements for accreditation set by the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa is a contextualized curriculum. As a staff at Scott Theological College in Kenya, we have discussed contextualization and its application to the college curriculum, syllabi and the whole educational programme. This is yet another dimension of what is meant by contextualization.

The working definition of contextualization as developed by the Theological Education Fund is very brief. "Contextualization is the capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one's own situation."<sup>8</sup> The beauty of this definition is its simplicity. When interpreted by an evangelical, this definition has tremendous validity. The Gospel is applied and related to the situation in which you find yourself. The Gospel becomes meaningful and relevant as it answers the problems, needs and questions a people has. This is particularly helpful when thinking of theologies for developing churches.

- 
4. James O. Buswell, III, *Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method*, in *Theology and Mission* edited by David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) p. 87
  5. Byang Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism," *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* edited by J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 1217
  6. D. Von Allmen, "Birth of Theology", *International Review of Missions*, January 1975, p. 37
  7. James O. Buswell, III, "Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method,". 88
  8. Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian, *Ministry in Context*, p. 20

But what often passes for a contextualized theology falls short of biblical theology. It is beyond dispute that contextualization as defined by many is not rooted in Scripture. You begin with the context, understand the particular revolutionary situation where you are, and then later connect this with some "theological motif." What we have is a political ideology in the garb of Christianity with no vital relationship with the heart of Scripture.

*Ministry in Context* reflects the double-premise dialectic by which theology is derived. Paul Loffler, a theologian of development, states his methodology. "The methodology implicit is that of 'theology as process,' which consists in 'interaction between involvement and reflection' and interaction between the response of the people of God today to the Mission of God today and the records of past response and action."<sup>9</sup>

Here we find a relativity of the dialectic opposites, each interacting in order to form theology. Furthermore, we find a subjective, existential emphasis on Scripture. In fact, Scripture is not even mentioned. Involvement, *praxis*, doing — this forms the thesis. Reflection on the records of past action—this forms the antithesis. The result is the synthesis of theology. Here we find no earnest effort to learn, "thus saith the Lord" in Scripture. Propositional Revelation is not taken seriously. Man does not humbly bow before God as he learns the will of God from Scripture. Theology becomes a pretext for making a political ideology more palatable to people living in a Christian context.

Politicized theologians of the left, including those of Liberation Theology, Black Theology and Theology of Hope, all had their influence on the development of contextualization. One thing they have in common is their emphasis on *praxis*. First, you begin with activity and only then do you reflect on it. Gutierrez, a Liberation theologian, relates theology to action in these words. "What Hegel used to say about philosophy can likewise be applied to theology; it rises only at sundown. The pastoral activity of the Church does not flow as a conclusion from theological premises. Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it."<sup>10</sup>

In this context of theological writings, we evangelicals need to think carefully what we mean and do not mean by the term, "contextualization," if we are to escape the pitfalls of contemporary theology. Guidelines must be established to help us forge new frontiers and avoid unforeseen error.

The purpose of this article is to define carefully what evangelicals mean by contextualization and to expand each element of the definition with further amplification.

---

9. Ibid, p. 47

10. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973) p. 11

### **Definition of "Contextualization"**

Contextualizing Theology is that 8)dynamic process whereby 1) the people of God 6)living in community and interacting with believers throughout time and space, 4)under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit, 9)proclaim 7)in their own language and thought forms, 5)the Word that God has spoken to them 3)in their context 2)through the study of Scripture.

### **Amplification of Definition**

#### **1. Contextualization is done by the people of God**

Contrary to the conciliar approach to contextualization, the Evangelical views contextualization primarily in terms of communication and application. As Flond Efele has pointed out, "to Africanize Christianity cannot be an occasion for prefabricating a new theology. Christian values are universal values. The purpose of the Pan-African movement on African theology is to promote an African expression of the interpretation of the Gospel ... It is in hearing the Gospel that the Christian faith is born and the supreme purpose of African theology is to facilitate for Africans the conditions for hearing it." (Hesselgrave 1978:99)

Unregenerate men cannot do theology. Nor can individual believers in isolation from the believing community do theology. The study of Scripture and the understanding of the will of God can only be done properly by those who have entered a covenant relationship with the living God through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Nicholls speaks of "starting from within the circle of faith-commitment."<sup>11</sup> We live in a day when professing Christians do not see any relevance in prayer, worshipping, evangelizing, or memorizing Scripture. Bishop John Robinson in his book, *Honest To God*, confessed that he and many other seminarians did not see any relevance in the churchly discipline of prayer. The problem with theologians in many cases is that they either do not have a living faith in Jesus Christ or they do not approach life from within "The circle of faith-commitment."

"The contextualizing of biblical theology in a changing world demands a rethinking of the whole process of doing theology. But the Bible itself insists that the starting point must be from within the circle of faith-commitment to God's self-revelation in Christ. With the weakening of assurance of the knowledge of the content of the Christian faith, many theologians and communicators are, in practice, making the cultural context the starting point."<sup>12</sup>

---

11. Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1979), p. 55

12. Ibid, p. 55

When we speak of the “people of God,” we do not mean the elite who know the original languages of the Bible and who have graduate studies in theology and philosophy. The people of God are doing theology at every imaginable level: Christians reading their Bible and applying God’s truth to their own lives; lay persons who study Scripture in the preparation for teaching, witnessing and preaching; evangelists who study Scripture in order to proclaim the Gospel and bring men and women to faith in Christ; pastors, both ordained and non-ordained, official clergy and lay clergy, who study Scripture in order to preach the Word of God to the people of God on Sundays; men with a prophetic ministry who study Scripture in order to call society back to the ways of the living God, ways of justice, and righteousness; teachers who study Scripture in order to instruct students preparing for some greater Christian ministry; scholars who study Scripture in order to write books and articles both at the popular and professional level.

Whenever the people of God are interacting with the Word of God and their culture in order to apply Scripture to the lives of the people, there we have theology. This is nothing less than the priesthood of the believers.

## **2. Contextualization is through the study of Scripture**

If the starting point of the people of God is in “the circle of faith-commitment,” the Scriptures have priority for the people of God doing theology. Karl Barth waged a vigorous war against the old modernists whose “natural theology” ate up “grace” as revealed in Scripture. “The mystery of faith begins with the knowledge of Christ and not with philosophy and human tradition. (Col. 2:1-8)”<sup>13</sup>

The study of Scripture should be done by taking the whole of Scripture seriously. “Errors arise mainly from failing to take all the biblical data seriously. The Bible, we believe, contains all that is necessary for our guidance, but the *whole* Bible must be our guide. The apostolic faith is built on the total witness of the whole Bible, considered as a unity, each part contributing to the one revelation given by God which is the Christian faith.”<sup>14</sup>

The problem throughout history is that men with good intention seek to accommodate the Christian faith so as to make it more relevant and acceptable. Today theologians such as Bultmann, Tillich, John T. Robinson and others seek to make Christianity acceptable to secular men. But in their adjustments to Western culture, they have surrendered the heart of the Christian faith. As Dr. McGavran has written, these adjustments must be

---

13. Ibid, p. 56

14. Donald A. McGavran, “The Biblical Base from which Adjustments Are Made” in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* edited by Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles R. Taber (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), p. 55

rejected “on the grounds that instead of revelation judging culture, in such adjustments the culture has weighed revelation, found it wanting and folded it into a syncretistic form agreeable to modern man.”<sup>15</sup>

When interpreting Scripture we need to follow what Dr. Nicholls calls, “The objective-subjective principle of distancing from and identification with the text.”<sup>16</sup> By this he refers to a “two-way process of encounter.” Dr. Nicholls seeks to maintain a “balance between the objective authority of the Word of God and the subjective experience of the interpretation.” On the one hand we need to distance ourselves from the text by critical study of the Scripture. “The task of exegesis is the recovery of the *sensus literalis*, the literal or natural meaning of the text, involving the right use of the linguistic tools and historical method, traditionally known as the ‘grammatico-historical’ method.”<sup>17</sup> This he distinguishes from the more speculative historical critical method which operates on the documentary hypothesis of Scripture. Instead of us refashioning Scripture, we need to allow the Scripture to refashion our own pre-understanding, “recognizing its objective authority and its internal harmony.”<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand we need to identify with the text. This is the “fusion of the horizons” as the Holy Spirit illumines our hearts. Whereas the Neo-orthodox would accuse the Fundamentalists of stressing the cold, factual, propositional doctrines of Scripture, we need to recognize their accusations for what they are, the erecting of a straw man. As Dr. Nicholls writes, “This principle has always been well understood by evangelicals, especially those within the pietistic tradition. The interpreter receives the Word as God’s Word to his own heart. This principle reinforces the principles of perspicuity and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>19</sup>

### **3. The Context of the people of God**

By context we refer to the whole environment in which the people of God live, including the social, economic, educational, religious, philosophical and political; in brief, man’s culture. Culture is not static and therefore God must address each generation in each culture through His Word.

Culture is related to theology in several ways. First, culture forms the grid through which man perceives the revelation of God. Communication is not simply one way, from God to man. People immersed in culture have certain

---

15. Ibid, p. 45

16. Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization*, p. 49

17. Ibid, p. 49

18. Ibid, p. 49

19. Ibid, p. 50



perspectives. They see things in a particular manner. "Whenever an interpreter approaches a particular biblical text he can only approach it from his own perspective ... Thus the interpretative process involves a hermeneutical circle in which the interpreter and the text are mutually engaged and that the interpretation inevitably bears the marks of its historical context."<sup>20</sup> This means that culture both hinders and helps man in his understanding of Revelation. It hinders him because his pre-understanding may deflect from his perception of what God has really said. It may help him in that "every situation makes possible a certain approach to Scripture which brings to light aspects of the message which in other situations remains less visible or even hidden."<sup>21</sup>

Culture provides the language by which Scripture is understood and by which the Gospel is communicated. Vocabulary, syntax, figures of speech, analogies, patterns of logic and arrangement, religious and philosophical concepts and functions, all form together the medium by which a theology is conceptualized and communicated.

Context (man's culture) provides redemptive analogies by which men are enabled to understand the revelation of God. Don Richardson in *Peace Child* has demonstrated this. These analogies may be found in legends and records of the past. Or they may be found in contemporary beliefs and practices. But they are cultural road ways which lead people to an understanding of the Gospel.

Context also poses questions for which culture demands an answer. The particular problems and emphasis in a given culture may be significantly different from another culture. Since theology is meant to be the application of God's Word to man and his needs, theology is practical. It is not imposed on the laymen by the theologians, nor is it transplanted from one culture to another. This is one reason a Western theology is inadequate for the Third World.

We can say that beyond dispute God has spoken to man in his culture and in a certain measure accommodated Himself to the limitations we experience. This can be seen in Scripture as God disclosed Himself progressively over the years to the children of Israel, then to the Christian church in Hellenistic culture.

However, we cannot accept the recommendation that we must bifurcate the culture forms in Scripture and the supra-cultural meaning communicated thereby. There is something deficient in the manner by which

---

20. Rene Padilla, *Hermeneutics and Culture: A Theological Perspective*, in *Gospel and Culture* edited by John Stott and Robert Coote, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), p. 89

21. *Ibid*, P. 90

Daniel von Allmen sees the birth of Theology. He proceeds on the assumptions of textual criticism and form criticism. He confuses theology with Scripture. If theology is relative, being culturally conditioned, then he concludes Pauline Theology is relative. With that kind of un-evangelical presupposition, his conclusions are to be questioned.

Dr. Nicholls is correct when he says that "Evangelicals recognize the inseparable connection between biblical event and interpretation. In conceptual terms there is an inseparable relationship between the content and form of the Word of God. Both are overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so that the inscripturated Word is the authoritative Word that God intended. This biblical content form carries its own objectivity. It is not dependent on the relativity of the interpreter's own culture or the culture into which he contextualizes it. God in his sovereignty chose a Semitic Hebrew culture through which to reveal His Word ... In divine wisdom God chose Abram out of a Mesopotamian culture and through his descendants formed a carrier culture that reflected the interaction of the supra-cultural content and the cultural form. Thus there is a uniqueness about the Hebrew culture of the Bible. It is not just a culture alongside any other culture, but it becomes a unique culture that carried the marks of the divine-human interaction. In the providence of God this culture was able to faithfully carry the uniqueness of the divine message of creation, sin, redemption and supremely the incarnation and resurrection of the divine Son. Jesus Christ was born a Jew, and it is an affront to divine sovereignty to speak of a black Christ or an Indian or Italian Christ."<sup>22</sup>

While culture (context) forms the grid by which we perceive Scripture, that grid is not opaque so that we cannot perceive the basic teaching of Scripture. Some would suggest that all theologies are the result of cultural conditioning. The differing theological traditions in the Christian Church are explained by the different cultural contexts in which the peoples lived. As you scan church history, you find cultural dissimilation determining what people believed

No doubt culture did play a part. But such an explanation is simplistic in the extreme. This explanation does not consider the commonality of man, that these differing theologies are embraced by people of many different cultures, that God's Word is perspicuous for all who read it. Such an explanation leads to agnosticism for it assumes we are so conditioned by culture that we cannot see beyond it.

We believe instead that culture provides the seasoning of the food but does not change the nature of that food. We are not determined by our environment though we are obviously influenced by our environment. Culture will create different emphases but will not change the basic thrust of Scripture.

---

22. Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization*, p. 46

Culture then becomes the tool by which we communicate God's Word to others. Context (culture) is the medium through which God communicates and by which we respond. But culture does not shape the meaning or message of theology. Context is a servant and not the master.

Whatever part our context may play in the process of theologizing, our culture cannot be determinative. Scripture must be in practice our final authority. Harvey Hoekstra pointedly observes, "There was a time when Christians listened chiefly to the Bible and frequently failed to understand what was happening in the world and to relate the two. Today the opposite is true. We are so obsessed with the demands and developments of the secular world as determinative for mission that we have forgotten how often the Bible contradicts the world and diagnoses the world's needs in terms such as repentance and faith which the world continues to reject."<sup>23</sup>

#### **4. Contextualization is by the Illuminating Guidance of the Holy Spirit**

Doing theology in context is not possible without the Holy Spirit nor is it possible by the Holy Spirit alone. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word, quickens the mind and empowers for living. A true response to Scripture is therefore not possible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit only works in the minds of believers and primarily through the Scriptures. Scripture is the yardstick to judge whether or not an alleged insight by the Holy Spirit has divine origins or not.

#### **5. Contextualization is by the Word that God has Spoken**

The "Word that God has spoken" is here distinguished from the written Word of God, for it refers to that which God speaks to us through Scripture derived by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This presupposes only a partial understanding of the total revelation. Theology contains insights that are gained through the study of Scripture. But these insights are fragmentary. This necessitates a continual return to Scripture for correction, clarification and confirmation. The written Word of God must always judge the "Word that God has spoken." For we are ever led to conclusions which we erroneously credit to the Holy Spirit.

It would seem that we must distinguish between several different "Words" that God speaks to us in our context. The two polar points are the Written Word of God and the context in which one interprets that Word. There are certain levels of theologizing which are heavily informed by the context. When evangelizing, for instance, we must begin with the person and his felt needs. In this case the context is very prominent in the way we present the Gospel.

---

23. Harvey Hoekstra, *The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishing, 1979), p. 83

There is another level of theologizing, however, when we search the whole of Scripture to know all that God teaches His people. We are concerned not merely with fragments of truth, but "the whole counsel of God." At this level of contextualizing the Scriptures are central with the context playing a less important role.

In all cases theology reflects our understanding of what God has spoken in Scripture. Whenever God speaks to us we cannot escape our context. But there are levels of theology which are moulded more by our context than others. Biblical theology, though not uninfluenced by culture, will certainly be universal in its content. The Christians in particular cultures are united with the universal church in professing one faith. But the Word of God as we understand it must be continually reformed through the collective study of Scripture which is our final authority.

**6. Contextualization is by living in Community and Interacting with Believers throughout time and space**

Properly speaking, contextualizing theology cannot be done in a classroom situation. It is a communal exercise as the people of God, hungry for the Word of God, study the Scriptures together in their own environment. Contextualizing theology is not done in the ivory tower. It is not primarily an academic exercise by individuals. As the community sits together with the Word of God, there is a growing understanding of what God is saying to them in their time and space.

Koyama in his book, *Water Buffalo Theology*,<sup>24</sup> is a good example of how *not* to do theology in context. While it provides interesting reading and certainly reflects a desire to relate to the culture where he serves it has three serious defects. First, he does not grapple with Scripture, nor does he seriously study the Word of God in its totality. Secondly, it is not "Buffalo" Theology, but rather a westernized version, with all sorts of ideologies learned from the West creeping into it. Ralph Covell asks this question, "Is this a product of his Asian mind, or of his ten years of American training? ... I question whether this is really 'water buffalo theology.' Its very sophistication seems more appropriate for the University classroom."<sup>25</sup> Thirdly, he fails to distinguish between natural theology and biblical theology.

Truly contextualized theology cannot be done by theologians in Geneva or Rome. Nor can it be done by men whose minds are immersed with western categories of thought, and western philosophies. This means that Contextualized Theology cannot fully evolve within a generation, though steps can obviously be taken.

---

24. Kasuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books: 1976)

25. Ralph Covell, Book Review of *Water Buffalo Theology* by Kosuke Koyama, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1977, p. 56

And contrary to the opinion of many, theology is spontaneously being contextualized throughout the Third World in Christian hymns being written to traditional melodies, in sermons preached in churches and schools by nationals, and by the Christians as they interact with Scripture in their context. Wherever you have Scripture in the vernacular language, you have the basis for a contextualized theology.

The whole issue of theology being a community affair, as they interact with believers throughout time and space, is an extremely important matter. This point has been placed nearer the end of the guidelines for a purpose. If Scripture is normative, then it must not be obscured by our theological framework being forced on Scripture. But contextualized theology can never be provincial or narrow. Otherwise, it becomes sectarian. Contextualized theology must be related to the heart of the basic doctrines of the historic Christian church. The context adds the pepper and salt but it does not alter the content in such a way as to create a conflicting theology. The beauty of the Christian faith is that in spite of the hundreds of denominations and differing theological emphases, those who are truly evangelical in their faith can all ascribe to the Lausanne Covenant. There is something more that unites us than an administrative structure. Jesus Christ as He is revealed in Scripture, and the essential elements of the Gospel revealed in the Word of God, are the bond that brings us together. For a contextualized theology to sever that bond would be a travesty and proof of its unsound presuppositions.

#### **7. Contextualization is in their own Language and Thought Forms**

Contextualization is pre-eminently rooted in the vernacular translation of the Word of God. That translation must be both faithful to the original texts in Hebrew and Greek and it must convey the message with the impact and meaning that God intended. Without the translation of Scripture, you can have no contextualized theology. Therefore, translation is crucial.

Once Scripture is translated into the vernacular, theological reflection by the people is then possible, free to draw upon figures of speech, analogies, patterns of logic and arrangement, religious and philosophical concepts. Theology is proven to be contextualized by the response it evokes from the people. If the truth of Scripture is communicated by a medium which seems foreign, then it is not contextualized. If the message pierces the heart and seems like their own, then it is contextualized.

Once again, Koyama's theology cannot be a "Water Buffalo Theology" since it is written in English. If contextualized theology is anything other than an academic discipline, it is just this: God's Word communicated through the people's language and thought forms.

## **8. Contextualization is a Dynamic Process**

“The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12 NIV)

The Word of God is living because of the active work of the Holy Spirit in bringing it alive to the people of God as they read it. As men respond to that Word, there is growth in understanding. The picture Paul points in Ephesians 4 is that of being built up “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

“Dynamic process,” therefore, does not mean shifting and changing. Nor does it imply theologies that differ in their essential content. By this we mean a living relationship with Jesus Christ and His Word, so that our behaviour becomes more and more like Christ, so that our understanding of God and His will becomes more and more clear to us. “Unity of the faith” is the accent of the Apostle Paul which is in contrast to the contemporary emphasis on diversity. This is not a unity forced on people. But a recognition that God is one, that He has spoken in Scripture which is marked by harmony and unity, and that as the Holy Spirit leads His people into the study of Scripture there is growth, both in life and understanding.

## **9. Contextualization is for Proclamation**

Proclamation implies Mission. Theology ought not be an academic discipline unrelated to life and mission. Theology is the reflection on the Word of God so that behaviour results. Proclamation is inextricably connected with the knowledge of God’s Word.

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Rom. 10:14)

The best theologians are “task theologians” who are reflecting upon the Word as they seek to proclaim the Gospel in Mission. To isolate theology from life and mission is to misunderstand the intent of God’s revelation of Himself and His will for the peoples of the world.

## **CONCLUSION**

The exciting feature about contextualization is not that it affords hope of reform and renewal, but that the process of making the Word of God incarnate has been going on for several millennia, centuries before anyone conceived the word, “contextualization.” God is at work, through us and in spite of us. Though churches rise and fall, though nations are christianized and de-christianized, Jesus Christ’s Word shall never fail. The Lord affirmed, “I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

We have a task to perform by the help of the Holy Spirit, to let the Word speak to people in their context. Now that the Church is universal, planted among most peoples of the world, we have the responsibility to encourage an immediate application, a direct relating of biblical truth to context, so that God's solution meets man in his need.

But we proceed "within the circle of faith-commitment" to Jesus Christ and the written Word of God. We stand with His people throughout the ages who have confessed, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."



---

## New Testament Theology

by D. Guthrie

(Downers Grove, USA: InterVarsity, 1981) pp. 1064, \$24.95

---

Donald Guthrie has provided us with an encyclopedic exposition of New Testament thought. He has taken into account the interpretational and exegetical issues associated with almost every text with which he deals. This massive NT theology is in essence a commentary on the New Testament arranged topically. It is also a synthetic presentation of the major and minor topics of NT theology which also takes into account the historical and literary matrix from which and in which they were expressed.

In his 75 page introductory chapter, Guthrie makes his case for his own approach to NT theology. Reacting to recent trends in the method and purpose for doing NT theology, the author proposes to display the overriding unity of NT thought. He further desires to move beyond simply an historical study of what the biblical writers believed. He purposes to theologize, to expound the normative content of NT thought and apply it to today. To achieve these ends, Guthrie organizes his work first of all according to theological theme and secondarily according to New Testament writer. The NT writer serves as a witness to the theme. Guthrie provides helpful summaries periodically to tie together the main points of his exposition. In these ways the unity and the theological message are always to the fore. The diversity of the contribution of a variety of NT writers is kept in the background.

The 900 pages of text on theological themes is divided into ten chapters of fairly equal size. The author's initial chapter on God, His titles, and attributes sometimes reads simply as a catalogue of biblical evidence. The frequent use of cross references to later discussions, unavoidable at the beginning of such a large volume, however, does prevent the reader from sensing that in this first chapter he is dealing with a comprehensive treatment of the subject. The handling of God's attributes, especially His glory, is good. The author, then, moves naturally in his next chapter to consider creation: the world and man. He makes a good case for the reality of creation's spiritual dimension, especially Paul's anthropological terms. His concluding section on sin prepares the way for his next chapters on Christology and Soteriology. A recurrent theme in Guthrie's work first appears in this chapter, the New Testament's positive regard for women.



The next two chapters deal with God's provision of salvation in Christ. The Christology chapter, a two hundred page essay, has some distinctive strengths. After setting out the NT teaching on Christ's humanity, Guthrie presents a masterful exposition of the background and use of the key Christological titles. His analysis of Messiah and Son of Man are most well developed. Guthrie balances this fine presentation with a discussion of Christological hymns and key Christological events: virgin birth, resurrection, and ascension. As the author describes the saving mission of Christ in the next chapter, he places two themes side-by-side: the kingdom and the atoning death.

The benefits of this salvation: the Holy Spirit, the Christian Life, and the Church take up the next three chapters. The author jousts, though not by name, with the pentecostal approach to Acts and Paul. This he does as he provides lucid profiles of the Holy Spirit's work in these writings. After a good description of NT teaching on repentance and faith, Guthrie deals with grace, especially how it relates to apostasy and predestination. His attempts to find apostasy/predestination teaching in every NT writer are not totally successful. He handles well the issues of perfection and the role of law in the Christian life.

As he had to do when he discussed the atoning death of Christ, Guthrie must distinguish between pre-resurrection and post-resurrection thought when he speaks of NT teaching on the church. He makes a good case for seeing Jesus' teaching as containing founding principles for the church which were worked out in the life and thought of the early Christian community. The author has a preference for lack of structure in church polity and this comes out in his analysis. The role of women in the church is again discussed at some length.

The author concludes his work with a thorough discussion on eschatology, ethics and Scripture. Guthrie is amillennial with a penchant for taking the concrete descriptions of heaven, hell, and the future life as symbolic. He argues against pre-millennialism and the pre-tribulation rapture. He presents a good classification and description of the vices and virtues in NT ethical teaching. He summarizes in helpful categories issues in social ethics.

As the crown of his work, Donald Guthrie presents a concluding chapter on the NT teaching about Scripture. He does this only to provide an exposition of an important element of NT thought "But another reason for its inclusion is the role it has to play in deciding the extent to which NT theology can be considered normative. Clearly since the testimony of the NT is backed by an authoritative and inspired text, its teaching must have more than a descriptive function and must form the basis of the doctrinal position of the on-going Christian Church" (p. 982).

The major strengths of Guthrie's work are in the areas of its scope and its emphasis. As already noted, the work is truly comprehensive. It is an invaluable resource for dealing with interpretational problems on every aspect of NT theology. It provides the raw material fabricated into coherent, synthesized form from which contemporary systematic theology should be produced. No more clearly does this contribution come into focus than in his summary statements (e.g. the summary profile of NT teaching on the church, pp. 787-789). Guthrie's perspective is that NT thought is a coherent unit. This means that methodologically, he offers a refreshing alternative to rationalistic analysis which consistently concentrates on the diversity within the text and by-passes any attempts to find coherent unity. He argues for a rehabilitation of harmonization as an appropriate method of analytical inquiry (p. 56). He more than once demonstrates the unity of which he is convinced by tracing aspects of a given theological theme throughout various writers (e.g. Ch. 5 on the Holy Spirit). By skillful interaction with twentieth century non-biblical thought, he establishes the validity of his other conviction: the NT message is valid for today.

There are some weaknesses which also need to be noted. Because of its size and the length of its chapters, the work is not well suited for classroom use. Admittedly the chapters are subdivided by headings. Yet, Guthrie's aim to portray Scripture's unity on given theological themes almost necessitates that one read an entire chapter, often 100 pages, at one sitting in order to get the full effect of his presentation. Of course the summary statements help.

With a work of this size there is bound to be an unevenness of presentation. This does happen, for some parts of NT theology seem less well digested than others. The unevenness shows itself when in some portions Guthrie simply lists the evidence relevant to his given theological theme but doesn't show how the elements fit into a coherent whole (e.g. the evidence for God as king in the Book of Revelation, p. 87).

Two weaknesses in the book's structure are; firstly, no separate treatment of the gospel writer's theology except for John. The Synoptics' material is taken mainly as evidence for Jesus' teaching. Since such a treatment is lacking in the other major evangelical NT theology (G.E. Ladd's), it is a deficiency most to be regretted. Secondly, the NT content in any given chapter is consistently presented in canonical order, save for Johannine literature. This is also a broadly chronological sequence. It would have been more helpful if a stricter chronological scheme had been developed and followed. Then, the influences of historical factors on the diversity of emphasis and approach in NT thought by the various authors could have been taken into account. Often times the reader finds himself asking why one NT writer differs from another and struggling to understand the differ-

ences in historical context, i.e. who preceded whom in time; was there any influence one on the other?

Guthrie admirably seeks to consistently make application of the NT message to today. He presents his hermeneutical bridge as follows: "The environment of modern man is essentially different from that of first-century man, but the same problems arise in relation to God. Since the problems are not environmental as is sometimes supposed, what the NT says about man cannot be considered obsolete" (p. 116). The author battles mainly with the empiricist existential interpretation of the NT. He fails to take into account the new wave of challenge to the NT normativeness. Linguists, sociologists, and anthropologists are arguing for an epistemology in which meaning is environmental in origin. It is derived out of the socio-cultural matrix. In order to maintain the normativeness for the message of an ancient text in a contemporary context, one is going to have to construct his hermeneutical bridge out of a wider range of arguments than simply an appeal to the common spiritual needs of first and twentieth century man.

There are a number of ways Guthrie's work is helpful for doing theology in an African context. He presents a good exposition of NT teaching concerning the spiritual world in his chapter on creation. Although his thrust is to argue for the reality of supernatural forces beyond the material (the African does not need to be convinced of this), in the process he lays out clearly all the relevant NT evidence. In his concluding summary about Christology, Guthrie stresses that his presentation has involved the description of the teaching about Christ in a form that precedes its expression in Greek terms of the orthodox creeds from the fourth and fifth century. As an African wrestles with Biblical teaching directly in Guthrie, his task of interpreting the truth about Christ and indeed all other Christian truth is greatly simplified. He can move with the aid of this NT theology directly from biblical thought to contextualized African theological thought with a minimum of influence from the intervening western theological thought tradition. Guthrie is also helpful in the area of apostasy/predestination. A study of the NT teaching on the subject will guide the church's leadership in dealing with backsliding in the church. Two areas where he will prove less beneficial are church order, since he is biased against structure, and ancestral spirits, since he is quite vague in his interpretation of Scripture's teaching about the intermediate state.

The evangelical world is especially indebted to Donald Guthrie for sharing with it the mature fruit of many years of reading, thinking and teaching about New Testament thought. Every reader is certainly enriched by careful study of a volume which achieves its goal: a lucid exposition of the normative and unified truth of God found in the New Testament.

W.J. Larkin, Columbia Graduate School of Bible and Missions

---

## **Approaches To Old Testament Interpretation**

by J. Goldingay

(I.V.P., Leicester, 1981), pp. 191, NP

---

This is another welcome title in the series: Issues in Contemporary Theology. In his introduction, the author clearly points out that his aim is to survey various ways in which the Old Testament has been interpreted. By reading the book in question, it is hoped that the reader will come to grips with the significance of the Old Testament for the contemporary church. The author points out that the Old Testament belonged to Christianity from the beginning. Thus these Scriptures played a significant role in the faith of Jesus and that of the early Church.

In order to bring his point home, the author attempts to deal with some basic questions. Such issues include the following: the relationship between Old Testament stories and the New Testament teaching; the Old Testament's view of history; the key to interpreting the Old Testament; whether we can use the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament; the implications of the Old Testament to the New Testament believer, etc.

The book itself is divided into five chapters dealing with broad topics, which are divided further into rather more specific subjects.

Chapter one deals with the Old Testament as faith, a subject which is narrowed further into the definitions and materials for Old Testament Theology. In this chapter, Goldingay touches on one of the most sensitive issues in Old Testament Theology, that is finding the centre or grid of Old Testament Theology. He makes the point that there is no consensus among scholars concerning this issue. The author opts for biblical theology rather than either an Old Testament Theology or New Testament Theology. Accordingly, there is a basic unity of outlook between the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, the Universalism of the New Testament is also found in the Old Testament (cf. Genesis 1-11 which emphasize God as the God of the nations).

Chapter Two deals with the Old Testament as a way of life, in other words, the life of the Old Testament believers is a walk (halakah). The basic issue here concerns the extent to which the Church in the 20th century can apply Old Testament commands to her situation. The solution to this problem, according to the author is to interpret Old Testament passages within their cultural, historical, geographic and theological contexts. A point of emphasis is that the Scriptures are God's revelation to us and thus both the Old Testament ethical commands and the New Testament teachings are binding on the church today. Punishment comes not only through breaking God's

commands, but also in failing to obey them. Thus Jesus reveals the true meaning of the Torah and calls on His disciples to put it into practice.

Chapter Three deals with the Old Testament as the story of salvation. The author challenges the approach of viewing the Old Testament from a narrow perspective. He espouses the view of Von Rad and G.E. Wright that God's acts in history are not the sole theme in Old Testament Theology. For example, the wisdom books, some of the Psalms and the prophetic teaching against Israel and the nations seldom refer to this theme.

On the other hand, Goldingay points out that the wisdom tradition can be integrated into the salvation history approach. Thus wisdom is a way of life issuing from God's acts of grace and judgement in the past.

A concluding note in this chapter is that Old Testament faith is much wider than salvation history. It should be pointed out however that the importance of this theme should not be obscured by the multiplicity of Old Testament faith. The author challenges Von Rad's views and those of others who doubt the reliability of Old Testament narratives (the challenge which the reviewer supports fully).

Chapter Four discusses the issue of the Old Testament as witness to Christ. Specifically, the question of typology is dealt with at length. Typology is described as dealing with the correspondence between Old Testament and New Testament events (which are not mere repetition nor are they identical).

According to Goldingay, typology is an approach to the theology while on the other hand, allegory is an approach to interpretation (i.e. hermeneutical principle). In other words, typology concerns itself with events while allegory is a method of interpreting words. The author's point is well taken that "types are events, persons or institutions, which become symbols of something brought about later which is analogous too, yet more glorious than the original" (p. 107). Another point worth noting is that New Testament typology moves from the anti-type to the identification of the type (not vice versa).

Chapter Five deals with the relationship between tradition, revelation and theology. The key issue is that of the Old Testament canon (thus the title "Old Testament as Scripture"). The author challenges the so-called traditio-historical approach of Von Rad and his colleagues. He legitimately asks the question, "How do the concepts of tradition and that of revelation relate?" According to him, revelation is the unfolding of God's purposes and will to man (self-disclosure - "thus says the Lord").

The author makes some very interesting points. For example, interpreting the Old Testament is interpreting written scripture and not traditions behind the texts. Thus Goldingay positively and boldly defends the canon of Scripture. "The canonical writings, then, are those concerning which the

people of God have had sufficient confidence that here God has spoken to declare that they comprise the Scriptures; they are then a norm for evaluating what one finds in other words that have some claim to be the words of God" (p. 145). He critiques the way the Old Testament was interpreted during New Testament times (especially the midrashic approach).

The book touches on some important issues. It is a great challenge to theological students and Bible teachers in Africa today (especially in East Africa) thus it commends itself in the areas of Old Testament Theology and interpretation. Of special significance is the author's unbiased attitude and openness in dealing with those whose views are different from his.

Julius Muthengi, Scott Theological College

---

**Christian Hope and The Future of Man**  
by S.H. Travis  
(I.V.P., Leicester, 1980), pp. 143, £2.85

---

The concept of cosmic eschatology is very alien to the African mind, according to John Mbiti who observes that "there are no myths of the future in traditional African societies" (**N.T. Eschatology in an African Background**, O.U.P., 1971, p. 56). The modern Western mind fares little better. It is widely assumed that we are living in a causally enclosed universe and besides, the very vastness of the cosmos challenges the credibility of the parousia doctrine. Will Christ come as a space-traveller or as one who moves from a parallel dimension to this one? Perhaps the N.T. term **apokalupsis** (unveiling) implies the latter. Will the "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1) include the replacement of the 100,000 million stars of our galaxy, not to mention the millions of other galaxies in the universe? Or will it be a more local affair? Any recent treatment of Biblical eschatology from an evangelical perspective is most welcome, and Stephen Travis has made a creditable contribution in this field.

**Christian Hope and the Future of Man** is a recent addition to the excellent I.V.P. series, 'Issues in Contemporary Theology' which has I.H. Marshall as its General Editor. Dr. Travis, a lecturer at St. John's College, Nottingham and author of two other books on eschatology (**The Jesus Hope**, I.V.P.; and **I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus**, Hodder and Stoughton) sets out in this volume to describe and comment upon the debates which have taken place during the last twenty years or so between both theologians and philosophers concerning individual and cosmic eschatology. He first sets the stage by outlining the nineteenth century background with its tendency towards Universalism and its growing pre-occupation with the Kingdom of God issue. We then have a two chapter excursus into the nature, background and significance of Apocalyptic literature, which is followed by a discussion of Pannenberg, Moltmann and Braaten whose insights have been strongly influenced by the Apocalyptic world-view. Travis then turns to the doctrine of the Second Coming and discusses the work of Bultmann, C.H. Dodd and John Robinson, and finally the Heilsgeschichte school of Cullmann and Kümmel whose views best reflect his own. The penultimate chapter is concerned with the question of such issues as mind-body dualism and the intermediate state. Many readers may be shocked to learn that such distinguished theologians as Tillich and Moltmann seem not to believe in any afterlife at all. The book concludes with an evaluation of recent thinking on the Last Judgement, and Heaven and Hell.

As one might expect, the book displays a clearly British perspective. It is significant, for example, that the Millennium debate is only mentioned once

in passing (p. 64), which one might contrast with Hoekema's recent book, **The Bible and the Future** (Eerdmans, 1979) which is written from an American perspective and contains three chapters on the Millennium issue. Travis also dismisses Dispensationalism in a sentence (p. 64). Such British scholars as Dodd and Robinson may be unfamiliar to most African students, although Mbiti inter-acts with both of them in his book on eschatology which, in fact, is based on his Ph.D. thesis, written for Cambridge University, England.

Travis' own views will not please all evangelicals. He ignores the Reformed notion of human freedom and boldly assumes the autonomy of man's moral choices in his discussion on the acceptability of the doctrine of Final Judgement (p. 120). He follows a growing number of scholars (including Hoekema) who reject the idea that the soul is intrinsically immortal (p. 118). More controversially, he seems to represent two slowly growing trends in British evangelical thought: a tentatively hopeful view concerning the fate of the unevangelized (pp. 131-132), shared by e.g. C.S. Lewis and J.N.D. Anderson; and a sympathetic re-evaluation of the notion that Hell is annihilation (p. 135), shared by e.g. J.W. Wenham.

I, myself, would have appreciated a shorter treatment of Apocalyptic and the inclusion of a discussion on the views of other influential theologians like Teilhard de Chardin. On page 23, Travis informs us that Teilhard and Process theologians are excluded because their eschatological views "seem so much part of a larger 'system' that justice could not be done to them in the space available". But it is hard to see how this is any the less true of, for instance, Moltmann. It would seem to me, in any case, that Process eschatology could be dealt with in very little space since most thinkers of this school follow their mentor A.N. Whitehead in assuming that the present universe is everlasting and that the only future for the individual is in the mind of God.

I could quibble over a few of Travis' conclusions. For example, he seems sympathetic with the view that "hell is not a punishment for turning one's back on Christ and choosing the road that leads to destruction. It is where the road goes" (p. 121). But Scripture seems clearly to include the punitive element (e.g. Matt. 25:41). Nevertheless, Travis has done an admirable job. His presentation is clear and comprehensive, and his judgments are fair and balanced. He has a crisp, succinct style which is particularly important in discussing a subject which can so easily become amorphous. This, and every other book in the series, should be bought and read by every serious student of theology.

Robert Cook, Scott Theological College



---

**Commentary on Joshua**  
by M.H. Woudstra  
(Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981), pp. 396, \$16.95

---

Once in a while one comes across a commentary that catches one's imagination and stands out as more than a good commentary. That Marten Woudstra has done this for a book that is not well served with commentaries is truly remarkable.

Woudstra recognizes that the book is not just history, nor just a character study of the man Joshua, but it is first a record of what God has done. He sees clearly that it is the Living Word of God to man, and that exegesis properly done gives access to what God says. He does not say this just to be categorized as a Conservative Evangelical scholar, but rather there is a consistent emphasis throughout the commentary that the Book of Joshua is the revelation of God's Word to man through what God has done.

Following the format of the New International Commentary of the Old Testament Series there are a number of introductory articles dealing with matters such as title, and purpose, authorship and date, unity, occasion, background and so on. Though these are not overlong (50 pages out of 400) they do cover the ground in adequate detail without burdening the reader with intricate analysis and evaluation of differing critical views. These are well worth reading since, as well as covering much valuable material, they set the tone of the book as a whole.

In an important section on Theology, Woudstra emphasizes that theology is not an appendix to exegesis but is an integral part of it, being concerned with what God says about himself. He points out three major themes that run through the book: The fulfilment of promises made to the forefathers, the not-yet of fulfilment (there is still much to be done), and the faithfulness of God to the covenant. Another major component is the focus on the land with its underlining of the fulfilment of the old covenant promises. He also gives a caution against over-rating the importance of typology.

The Book of Joshua has features which suggest that it was carefully ordered, a number of these are listed in the section on unity of composition. There is evidence that the author had considerable skill as a writer, particularly in his use of suspense. In order to heighten the drama the narrative frequently uses prolepsis, that is the reader is alerted to something which is later developed in more detail. This aspect of Hebrew narrative technique accounts for what others have supposed to be the weaving together of two different documents.

Woudstra is fully aware that O.T. scholars have strong differences of opinion regarding the book and gives a fair survey of these without compromising his position. Those who wish to follow up critical and textual questions, or historical details of the views of other scholars are well provided with many adequate footnotes, references and a comprehensive bibliography.

The commentary itself is divided into manageable sections introduced by the author's own translation. In spite of a wealth of material and explanatory details the commentary reads easily, with Woudstra managing to capture the drama of the book, particularly by conveying some of the excitement as the climaxes are reached.

Mention is made of other important themes which recur as the book progresses. These include: failure apart from God, land as inheritance, the importance of obedience to the covenant, parallels between Joshua and Moses showing the continuity of God's work (this is a very interesting insight), an emphasis on the participation of all Israel. Six maps illustrate geographical features, tribal areas and the major campaigns; these are particularly useful.

This is an outstanding evangelical commentary that will greatly enrich our understanding of this very significant part of the Old Testament.

Colin Densham, Moffat College of Bible, Kijabe

---

**The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction**  
by S.B. Ferguson  
(London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1981), pp. 179, \$3.75

---

"What do you think about taking doctrine class?" one first year student asks another on the eve of his first course in systematic theology. "I don't know for sure," is the reply, "but I'm praying it doesn't destroy my Christian experience!" If you have ever heard a similar dialogue or prayed similar prayers then perhaps you should read, and really read - slowly, prayerfully, meditatively - Sinclair Ferguson's **The Christian Life**. As J.I. Packer writes in the forward, this is theology that is "fresh and compelling ... applying Bible teaching with insight and wisdom to the condition of plain people" (p. ix). Dr. Ferguson, former pastor in Glasgow, Scotland and currently lecturer in systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (United States), is writing to those Christians who want to deepen their experience by providing a "solid foundation upon which experience may be built" (p. xi). Because of his concern for preserving Christian experience, Dr. Ferguson has chosen to write on those doctrines that directly affect the Christian life.

His investigation into the Christian life takes him through eighteen chapters that conform (with a few creative exceptions) to the plan of salvation found in the standard conservative-Protestant theologies. Beginning with a fine chapter on the experiential value of Christian doctrine ("Knowing is For living"), this pastor-theologian lays the groundwork for salvation by surveying sin and its effects (Ch. 2) and "The Plan of Grace" (Ch. 3). The actual dimensions of the past and present Christian experience of salvation are analyzed in chapters four through sixteen as he discusses what it means to be called by God (Ch. 4), convicted of sin (Ch. 5), born again (Ch. 6), express faith and repentance (Ch. 7 and 8) and be justified, adopted, united to Christ and elected (Ch. 9 through 12). Chapters 13 through 15 explore the subject of sanctification while the final three chapters provide skillful discussions of what it means to currently persevere, eventually "sleep in Christ" and ultimately be glorified.

While not agreeing totally with the contents (e.g. his rejection in Ch. 4, following Calvin, that Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:11-19 refer to Satan) and not satisfied with his clarity of discussion at all points (e.g. his chapter on union with Christ tends to toss out points on the subject without showing tight connections between the various points and how they add up to union with Christ) I would say that his discussion overall is scriptural, practical and readable. Let me note some high points.

Chapter Two - "God's Broken Image" is a competent discussion of sin, essential if one is to appreciate the dimensions of salvation. I greatly appreciated his explanation of what it means to be "born again" (Ch. 6). He focuses on the familiar but immensely rich classical text of the new birth - John 3 - and discourses on the necessity, nature and effects of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. This chapter highlights perhaps the outstanding feature of Dr. Ferguson's theological method - clear and careful exposition of Scripture. There is little proof-texting but a great deal of searching and analyzing key passages bearing on a topic. As such, his work deserves to be called a biblical theology in essence though by its topical treatment it is a systematic theology in form. In this sense Ferguson's work is reminiscent of John Murray's **Redemption Accomplished and Applied**, a minor classic that underlies **The Christian Life** in both form, content, and theological method. One, also, should not miss Ferguson's treatment on justification (Ch. 9). African Christianity is subject to Luther's dictum, quoted by Dr. Ferguson, that "this article 'justification by faith' is the head and cornerstone of the church, which alone begets, nourishes, builds and protects the church; without it the church of God cannot subsist one hour" (p. 71).

The most rewarding section of **The Christian Life** is to be found in Chapters 13-15 where sanctification is treated as a continuing process surrounded by two crisis points (p. 118). The first crisis point or decisive event is the radical break with the dominion of sin that takes place at conversion. Romans 6:1-14 strongly reminds us that sanctification cannot be confined to the continuing, progressive overcoming of sin but that there is an immediate release of the Christian from enslavement to sin although the struggle with sin continues. This is not Wesleyan second blessing theology being taught. Instead, the fact is being pointed to that all Christians (not just a spiritual elite) **begin** the sanctification process enjoying the privilege of having sin's dominion (but not presence or punch) broken. Chapters 14 and 15 follow up this account of what John Murray called "definitive sanctification" by outlining the progressive dimension of sanctification, picturing it as a lifelong struggle against the world, the devil and the flesh. Chapter 15 focuses in on the battle with this last mentioned enemy which Dr. Ferguson defines as the "landing strip" in our beings for the powers of the world and the devil. Taking Colossians 3:1-17 as his key passage he explores the biblical dynamics of defeating indwelling sin in a way useful for every Christian eager to make his way along this earthly pilgrimage with surer step and better sense of direction.

Chapter 17 - "Asleep in Christ" - is a creative addition to a book on salvation. It deals with the crucial subject of knowing how to face death. Perhaps African Christians are stronger than their Western counterparts in this area but both groups will benefit from the practical directives remind-

ing us to so die daily in Christ that the eventual appointment with physical death will be "like the singer who has been through his rehearsals, and is perfect in his part, and has but to pour forth the notes once for all and have done." (Spurgeon quoted, (p. 168).

Dr. Ferguson began his survey of the doctrine of salvation with the "conviction that Christian doctrine matters for Christian living" (p. 1). In the opinion of this reviewer he has presented a convincing case for the truth of this conviction. In the course of presenting his case four powerful features of his book impress themselves upon the reader. First, the brand of theology presented is unmistakably reformed. The constant emphasis of Dr. Ferguson is that we are saved by God's unmerited love and grace in Christ. He rejects the man-centered humanistic thinking that had infected much of contemporary evangelicalism. Throughout the book the Puritan writers of seventeenth century England are a rich mine of theological insight for Dr. Ferguson (who incidentally did his doctoral dissertation at the University of Aberdeen on Puritan John Owen's view of regeneration). From these seventeenth century divines he projects the God-centered theology that dominated the Reformation of Luther and Calvin. The Augustinian theology of grace, which has been the vital force behind the renewal and advance of the church throughout her history, is offered once again as the way to life for contemporary Christianity around the world.

Second, Dr. Ferguson writes with a pastoral tone. There is sensitivity, warmth, charity and wisdom to his theological counsel that will be appreciated by theological students tired of the polemical wranglings that characterize (often out of necessity) so much contemporary theological discourse.

Third, his method is refreshingly scriptural. Unlike those theologians who pay lip service to scripture only to smuggle in their own (or others) human speculations, Dr. Ferguson is relentlessly biblical in his method, displaying his sound exposition of critical doctrinal passages for all to see and evaluate.

Fourth, despite these many strengths, this treatment of salvation has little application beyond the individual. One looks in vain for discussions of the claims of liberation theology and rival world religions. One should supplement Dr. Ferguson's strongly biblical treatment with David Well's **Search For Salvation** (IVP) and Tokunboh Adeyemo's **Salvation In African Tradition** (Evangel). Read in conjunction with these other studies, **The Christian Life** would make a valuable textbook for courses in the doctrine of salvation. For any reader it promises to open up the treasures of biblical salvation and make them gleam again in the contemporary world.

Mark R. Shaw, Scott Theological College

---

**Evangelical Theological Education Today**  
Paul Bowers, Editor  
International Council of Accrediting Agencies for  
Evangelical Theological Education, Numbers 1 and 2  
(Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1982)

---

In these first two numbers of a series called **Evangelical Theological Education Today**, the International Council of Accrediting Agencies presents papers read respectively at a consultation on theological education held at Hoddeston, England on March 17-20, 1980 under the auspices of the Theological Commission of the World-Evangelical Fellowship and at a second consultation of the ICAA at Chongoni, Malawi on September 1-4, 1981.

The series has been launched by the ICAA to provide exposure and interchange of ideas covering the whole range of evangelical concerns in theological education. The papers demonstrate that much thinking is going on, that a wide spectrum of ideas is being presented and that a good many of them are still in rather tentative stages of development. It is likely, however, that some constructive dialogue will result and that, in the end, substantial good will emerge. For anyone seriously interested in the cutting edge of reflection on theological education these publications are, and promise to continue to be, valuable sensors to watch on the direction of things to come in this exciting field.

Perhaps at this point a brief re-cap of the development of interest in theological education by evangelicals in recent history might serve to place the content of these papers in perspective - both historically and developmentally as the discussion has moved along.

Over the past ten years theological education has been the object of intense interest and experimentation in the evangelical world. For example, theological education by extension, a decade ago, was just coming to general attention. The insights and reflections stimulated by that movement have blended with other emphases - the doctrine of spiritual gifts, contextualization - to direct new attention to the total challenge of providing suitably equipped leaders for the churches. The problem has been particularly acute and urgent in dynamic and growing third world churches where large numbers of new converts have tended to out-run training programs. The vast TEE activities and production in many parts of the world continue to generate widespread interest and to make substantial contributions to the total task of theological education.

With the passage of years, and after the exaggerated claims and retorts from various sides of the TEE phenomenon, at least in many places things

have settled down to theological education programs that contain both residential and extension modules.

In the middle of the decade under consideration a new thrust in theological education appeared, first in Africa, with the formation of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa followed in 1980 by the setting up of the ICAA as a coordinating agency for similar regional associations around the world.

The motivation for these developments was concern for educational quality in theological training and the problems of recognition and credibility largely unaddressed by the TEE movement. The accreditation movement has been more comprehensive than the term implies in that the ICAA has been mandated by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship to involve itself with nearly every aspect of theological education and its response to the churches' needs. It is against this general background that the agenda for renewal in number 2 must be understood.

In these first two numbers of the series the wide variety of perspectives and subjects represent the enormity of the field this enterprise is trying to span in a wide diversity of needs and circumstances. A glance at the Table of Contents for the two issues will adequately illustrate this:

Number 1:

1. Evangelical Theological Education in the Changing World of the 1980's, Bruce Nicholls.
2. Opportunities for International Cooperation in Evangelical Education, Bong Ro.
3. Serving the Church in Cultural Context: The Role of Academic Accreditation, Lois Mckinney.
4. An Integrated Approach to Theological Education, Wilson Chow.

Number 2:

1. The Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education, Tokunboh Adeyemo.
2. The Role of Spiritual Development in Theological Education, Bruce Nicholls.
3. Accreditation as a Catalyst for Renewal in Theological Education, Paul Bowers.
4. Contextualization of Theology for Theological Education, Tite Tiénou.
5. Toward a Theology of Theological Education, James Plueddemann.

The dispersion of the writers in key points around the World is indicative of the global perspective on the total task of theological education:

The contributors to Number 1 are: Rev. Bruce Nicholls, Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, based in India; Dr. Bong Ro, Executive Secretary of the Asian Theological Association, based in Taiwan; Dr. Lois Mckinney, Executive Director of the Committee to Assist Ministry Education Overseas (CAMEO) in the United States; and Dr. Wilson Chow, Dean of the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong.

The contributors to the second collection are: Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo, General Secretary of the Associations of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM) and Chairman of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), from Nigeria and currently residing in Kenya; Dr. Bruce Nicholls, Executive Secretary of the WEF Theological Commission, with offices in India; Dr. Paul Bowers, General Secretary of the ICAA, based in Kenya; Rev. Tite Tienou, Executive Secretary of the AEAM Theological Commission and Chairman of ACTEA, from Upper Volta; and Dr. Jim Plueddemann, currently Dean of Wheaton Graduate School, and till recently working in Nigeria and a Member of the ACTEA Council.

A number of stubbornly asserted themes that should be encouraging to evangelicals keep surfacing in all the papers. There is a **theological** cast to every article, a conscious determination to attack educational problems from a theological perspective. Complementing this approach is the insistence on a **biblical** base for the whole enterprise of exploring theological education. This does not at all represent an anti-intellectual trend but it does provide a healthy safeguard against faddism in education or social science.

It would seem to this writer that the next item on the evangelical agenda could be the careful working out of definitions of a number of terms being used with reference to theological education. Among these are 'holistic' and 'integrated' and perhaps even a further consideration of the now familiar 'contextualization'. It is important that we know how these words are being used and what they mean in theological education if writers and readers (as well as writers and writers) are going to understand each other.

The agenda for renewal treated in number 2 provides much food for thought as well as a substantive need for delineation of the concept. Its outlines are still unclear; as a construct its usefulness still needs to be demonstrated. Perhaps these are questions for numbers 3 and 4.

Gerald E. Bates, COHETA Burundi



---

**Healing for Damaged Emotions**  
by D. Seamands  
(Victor Books, SP Publications, 1981), pp. 144, N.P.

---

David Seamands' book is designed to offer help for Christians suffering from emotional problems. The author believes that these problems may not necessarily be solved by ordinary ways of ministry, e.g. prayer, preaching, etc. but require special help. David Seamands is an American pastor with much experience of counselling people with "damaged emotions and unhealed memories" (p. 7). He gives many accounts of people who have been greatly helped by his ministry.

The book is very easy to read; it covers in some detail the problems of low self-esteem, perfectionism, and depression, and suggests ways of dealing with these problems. There is sound Biblical teaching, as well as helpful insights, e.g. "Whenever you experience a response on your part that is way out of proportion to the stimulus, then look out. You have probably tapped into some deeply hidden emotional hurt" (p. 97), and "a person with low self-esteem becomes extremely self-centred" (p.72), "when you devalue yourself you don't have anything left over to give to others" (p. 54). The author is obviously a very warm and sympathetic counsellor and warns against giving pat answers to those with emotional problems. He also challenges the reader to look realistically into his own life in order to face up to unexpressed anger and hurt.

In spite of its many strong points, the book does not really place sufficient emphasis on the sufferer's own responsibility. The sufferer is generally portrayed as passive and helpless and the emotional problems seem to be inevitable. Seamands does not say this in so many words, but the implication is very strong, due to the frequent use of the term "programmed" which conjures up a vision of a computer, rather than a human being with free will: "if (a child) is programmed for incompetence, he will be incompetent" (p. 64) "false ideas have been programmed into you (p. 74), "people with wrong programming that interferes with their present behaviour" (p. 13), "God's care cannot be felt without a deep, inner re-programming" (p.85). This idea could be very disconcerting for any parents reading the book, since many of the anecdotes are about children of Christian parents. According to the author, these parents are eager to serve the Lord and do their best to raise their children in a godly way; nevertheless, they give their children harmful programming.

Another weakness is that some of the suggestions are far too vague, e.g. those suffering from low self-esteem, who because of "wretched programming" find it "difficult to accept love", are told to "let God love (them)" (p.

75), but there is no indication of how they should go about it. However, the chapters on depression are much better in this respect, and many practical hints are given for dealing with depression, e.g. "(get) enough sleep" (p. 122), "eat properly and regularly" (p. 123), "avoid being alone" (p. 128), "seek help from others" (p. 128), "praise and give thanks ... to the Thesalonians, he didn't say 'feel thankful for everything', but 'in everything give thanks' 1 Thess. 5:18" (p. 129). In these chapters there is also more emphasis on the sufferer's responsibility, and the importance of forgiveness and facing up to anger: "Unless you learn to deal honestly with those angry roots (of depression), to face your resentment and forgive, you'll be living in a greenhouse where depression is sure to flourish" (p. 125).

**Healing for Damaged Emotions** is a "lightweight" book and consequently treats the subject matter fairly superficially. Nevertheless, it contains much helpful material and would be a useful addition to the library of anyone involved in a counselling ministry.

Alison Cook, Scott Theological College

---

**Reaching the Arabs: A Felt Need Approach**  
by T. Matheny  
(William Carey Library, 1981)

---

Tim Matheny's findings, based on concentrated research on Arabs of the Middle East, are much more widely applicable than his title would indicate. The importance of the group as opposed to the individual, the orientation towards people rather than towards time, the emphasis upon hospitality, the despising of manual labour, the centrality of religion in all relationships, and the persistence of underlying animistic beliefs and practices characterize Muslims much more generally than his study would cause one to assume.

Matheny's goal is "the construction of an evangelistic strategy for the Arab world" (p.2) on the basis of research into cultural dynamics. He focuses on the "Transitional Arab", whom he defines as the "Arab who is in the process of modernization" (p.3), since "Transitional Arabs are most receptive to evangelism." (p.3)

The book is divided into two parts. Part One deals with analysis. Here in the first section he discusses cultural themes including hospitality, the family, the function of religion, animistic superstitions, and the concept of time. In his second section, he concentrates attention on the social structure and points out that, as in many other cultures, "The currents of communication ... are not vertical but horizontal." (p.39) This underlines the vital role that kinship relationships play in determining the reaction of Middle East Arabs. Considerable attention is given to the importance of opinion leaders in the society and to their part in producing change.

His analysis is concluded in a third section where he speaks of restrictions to evangelism. Here the typical theological restrictions are discussed, including the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the crucifixion, along with other hindering factors such as the attitudes of the evangelist, group solidarity among Middle Easterners, and the foreignness of Christianity. Another restriction which is often tragically true of Muslim areas is the failure of churches to welcome converts from Islam.

Part Two is concerned with strategy. He devotes a section to the channels of communication, discussing the innovation-decision process, extending and basic media — the former useful in creating awareness and communicating knowledge, and the latter basic to moving people to decision. He also considers briefly the site where the Christian message may be most effectively communicated.

Another section analyzes the goal of the communicator. Here Matheny distinguishes between Christianization and Westernization. Then he goes on to discuss the means to the success of the evangelist. He states in summary: "The evangelist will be more successful if he properly identifies with the local people, if he makes Christianity relevant to their felt needs, and if he utilizes the proper opinion leaders." (p.109) Considerable attention is given to conversion as a religious rather than a sociological or racial decision, as a multi-individual and not only an individual decision, and in proportion to the degree of knowledge of the message. Also discussed in this section is the nature of the Church as an indigenous and as an ethnic unit. Brief attention is given to some specifics for contextualization.

In his final section on strategy, Matheny turns to the felt needs that provide the title for his book. As he discusses the message, he deals with suiting it to felt needs in order to make it more relevant. He does state that "Christianity cannot satisfy all the felt needs of the people without becoming distorted." (p.138) Recognizing that felt needs may be only a part of the ultimate needs of man, he points out that Christ set the example by ministering to felt needs. He also suggests that failure to meet felt needs may be one of the causes of syncretism. Then he presents a list of the suggested felt needs of Transitional Arabs, admitting that some such needs are in conflict with others so that attention must be given to the more dominant ones. One need he cites is surrender to God's will. "Surrender to God's will is the very essence of Islam and should be incorporated into the Christian message where appropriate." (p.151) The section is concluded with a brief discussion of such things as proverbs, illustrations and parables that will affect the style of the message so that it will be communicated in the most meaningful way.

A list of fourteen intermixed observations and recommendations makes up most of the concluding chapter.

Considering that Matheny's research has been done in the study rather than in the field, he has accomplished a superb piece of work. His bibliography is excellent, and much of his book consists of quotations from his sources. In fact, sometimes I wondered if the man had no ideas of his own. If you have my habit of checking footnotes, this may slow up your reading. Yet it may also inspire you to augment your library with some of his sources, as I have done. His cultural analysis concurs with much that we have found in our contact with Muslims in general and with Arabs in particular. Throughout the work you will find suggestions that are worthy of consideration. One of these is the possibility of group response to reduce the cultural adjustment that commonly follows conversion. Another is the importance of our allowing ourselves to be known by Muslims since they will be won by our lives more frequently than by our words. His stress on a

long-term commitment to Muslim evangelism, and on the learning of the language, is well-placed.

Matheny may be faulted for failing to state the role of the Spirit of God in conversion. It would appear from his writing that conversion is psychological and religious rather than a spiritual change.

His unquestioning acceptance of McGavran's thesis that "The resistance of Arabs to the christian faith does not arise primarily from theological considerations, but social (p. 118) makes the reader wonder if he has fully considered the evidence for theological opposition. His only supporting evidence, also drawn from McGavran, is the Indonesian turning from Islam to Christianity. Doubtless the social opposition to conversion is very strong, but spiritual factors ought not to be discounted.

A question basic to his entire strategy is his premise that the Transitionals ought to be the target for evangelism. Unquestionably they are easier to convert, but is ease of conversion the only consideration? What of the need for permanence in the resulting church when Transitionals are chiefly the educated and unmarried young men?

One final criticism concerns the method of research. Matheny concludes: "This study is restricted by all the limitations of library research, and the proposed evangelistic strategy will have to be tested on the field before its validity can be totally demonstrated. (p. 159) Would it not be better to test the theory in the field before submitting it to the public? Certainly some of us will put some of his ideas to the test, but could not their originator have done so with more determination and conviction? However, perhaps it is the theorists who have the answers, while those who are practically involved in the task are too close to the problem, too involved and too busy to enunciate theirs.

John G. Miller, SIM, Mombasa.