

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 7 P. 3

Volume 7 • Number 1 • April 1983

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews selected from publications
worldwide for an international readership,
interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary
living.*

GENERAL EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

On the mission field, western theology has tended to be very paternalistic. It has failed to adapt to life situations and often makes unreasonable demands on people, rewarding only those who break away from their culture and become “westernized.” The failure of missionaries to develop indigenous churches is due, in part, to the fact that subjects such as cultural anthropology and social sciences were not considered relevant to mission work until the church growth movement underscored their importance. Previously, the goal was “to change the people” and make them “Christian” and “civilized.” Western Christianity was equated with “civilization.” As Third World Christians, we are grateful for the attitudinal changes of missionaries in this area which have led to greater results in winning people to Christ.

What then is the difference, if any, between western theology and Third World theology? The secret lies, as Mitchel has pointed out, in the Hebraic thought pattern of Third World Cultures. There are amazing similarities between the Old Testament world-view and cultures and that of Third World cultures, particularly African culture.¹¹ p. 33

For western theology to survive it must produce a new understanding of faith which places emphasis not on philosophizing and theologizing (there is a place and time for these) but on faith that can be translated into life styles that are distinctly Christian and God-honouring. We Third World theologians must learn from the mistakes of the past but avoid isolationism in our theologizing. At the same time we must also avoid the strong temptation to legalism which would lead to “works without faith.”

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The Rev. Billy K. Simbo is Principal, Sierra Leone Bible College, Freetown, Sierra Leone. p. 34

An Asian Critique of Western Theology

¹¹ The following are two of many possible examples: (1) Hannah’s suffering over her barrenness and the taunt of the other wife ([1 Samuel 1-2](#)) will be easily understood by women in Africa because similar situations are common in Africa. (2) The parable of the friend at midnight ([Luke 11:6ff](#)) arouses sympathy in the heart of a typical African because the sleeping arrangements in his home are similar.

Han Chul-Ha

OUR CONCERN

What is our concern as we, evangelical theologians, come together to share our views on “Evangelical Theology”? Our common concern is to hold fast to the biblical faith which has been distorted by and large by various forms of western theology. Not all western theology caused this distortion. Until recently the biblical faith has been seriously recognized as the eternal truth. Attempts have been made to comprehend and expound the Bible in all its portions and aspects. Until the modern period, that is, when natural science made a rationalistic impact upon the mind of mankind and technological culture transformed the actual lifestyle of modern man, the truth of biblical revelation has maintained its integrity. Of course, there arose various forms of heretical faith because of the impact from non-Christian or extra-biblical religions. But there was not a basic disbelief in the invisible realities and metaphysical worlds. It is at the point of this disbelief of modern scientific rationalism concerning anything beyond the world of time and space or the sensible world, that modern western theology came in conflict with biblical faith. Modern western theology, however, made an attempt to escape from this fundamental conflict with the biblical beliefs through its typical methodology. This attempt to escape has been made by abstracting out a certain meaning from the integral faith of the Bible. Instead of taking the literal truth of the Scriptures, the method of abstraction is used, helping the modern western theologian to eliminate most of the stumbling blocks of biblical truth except for certain fundamental truths which vary, in fact, according to the system builder. It is with this background that “hermeneutics” has become a most important factor in recent years. The fundamental message of the Bible is considered to be culturally conditioned. Consequently, the dynamic equivalence of the biblical truth must be formulated in terms of every new cultural situation. Some scholars call this a process of demytho-logization as well as a process of mythologization in terms of a new mythical structure.

THE METHODOLOGY OF MODERN WESTERN THEOLOGY

In this methodology of theology, i.e., the method of reductionism or reducing the entire Christian truth to one particular idea, there is no distinction between the nineteenth century theology which Karl P. 35 Barth named, “Bewusstseins theologie” and the twentieth century theology influenced by existentialism. While nineteenth century theology took a certain biblical message in the form of a philosophical concept as a hermeneutical principle, the Bultmannians took the existential self-understanding of man as an hermeneutical principle. In spite of the extreme variety of western theology, there are several common characteristics in all of those systems. First, they are logically consistent systems which are established upon certain fundamental concepts, such as the idea of “moral conscience” in the system of Immanuel Kant, Schleiermacher’s “the immediate consciousness of absolute dependence,” Ritschli’s “the moral kingdom of God,” Hegel’s “the Weltgeist,” Berdjaey’s “the freedom,” Teilhard de Chardin’s “the evolutionary Cosmogenesis,” Tillich’s “the being,” Bultmann’s “the existential self-understanding,” Pannenberg’s “revelation in the mirror of history,” Moltmann’s “hope,” etc.

THE POWER HAS BEEN LOST

Secondly, since all these Cartesian theologians appropriate biblical revelation to various forms of human understanding, the reality and power are stripped from God and His revelation. The spiritual reality of God and the manifestation of His power in redemptive history is indeed the fundamental characteristic of God, the Lord of Israel, and Christ Jesus, the Lord of the Church. The unanimous teaching of the Old Testament is to worship, trust and love only Jehovah, the God of Israel, and no other God. The fundamental element in this faith is the reality of this God who will not fail to save one who trusts in Him. Consequently, the history of the Old Testament is the history of the manifestations of the saving power of Jehovah, the God of Israel. The fundamental teaching of the OT is that God is reliable and He is the only existing God. His power, His wisdom, His righteousness, His love and mercy are constantly praised as of the eternal, infinite, and incomprehensible God.

In the New Testament we discover that the same faith continues among the apostles. It was their concern that the God of their fathers continue to manifest His power through Jesus Christ, His Son. The same God of the OT now approves the new way of salvation with the accompaniment of signs and wonders. At Pentecost, Peter stood up before the Jews and all foreigners and declared that Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and signs which God did through Him. It was the power of God which was [p. 36](#) demonstrated through Jesus Christ when the lame man at the gate of the temple stood up and walked. Peter declared that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus. When Philip preached Christ at Samaria, the same miracles and signs were performed through him. At Ephesus "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" ([Acts 19:11](#), 12). Therefore, He declares that He is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth ..." ([Rom. 1:16](#)) and he wrote to the Thessalonians "... our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ..." ([1 Thess. 1:5](#)). He wrote to the Corinthians the same words: "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" ([1 Cor. 2:4, 5](#)).

Now the modern western theology is doing exactly the opposite of what Paul did, that is, it presents the gospel in terms of "enticing words of man's wisdom" rather than in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Thus, the faith of modern western theologians stands mainly on the wisdom of men rather than on the power of God.

Of course, the reality and existence of God and the manifestation of His power are not the only principles of God which we hold fast according to biblical faith. In the Bible we can find immense spiritual riches which are indeed beyond human comprehension such as the classical formulations about His perfections: *His aseity*, that is He is none other than He Himself. God is the Initiator and no one can dare to take an initiative before Him unless the power of initiative is given to him from God. God is indeed self-caused as His name indicates in the Bible, namely: "I AM THAT I AM" ([Ex. 3:13](#)) and "I AM THE LORD, the First and the Last: I AM HE" ([Is. 4:4](#)). *His immensity*, that is, His replete omnipresence within His created worlds and all things therein. *His eternity* as the perfection of God as often expressed by "the incommunicable attribute" and those perfections of God as the personal Spirit: wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, and love in all their absolute, divine, majesty.

Even though these expressions in human words are not adequate to guide us to the very divine Source Himself, yet they try to assess the biblical faith of God, distorting less

than those modern western theological formulations which take their wrong methodology from [p. 37](#) the very inception by not taking seriously the biblical literal teaching. Consequently, those formulations are doomed to depart from the biblical faith from the very beginning. Since they are concerned with their own “ideas”, they screen the divine perfections through the glasses of their “ideas” and lose sight particularly of the reality of God and His power!

THE INVISIBLE DIMENSION WAS LOST

Because of the secularistic spirit of modern western theology, it has completely lost the spiritual dimension of the biblical faith, that is, the major portion of the reality in the divine economy of creation and redemption. Since their view is confined to the space, time, and lifespan of human individuals, biblical faith of the larger and wider economy of God, which goes far beyond the scope of the visible world, has been lost. Scripture starts with the account of the creation of heaven and the earth.

The Bible, however, proceeds immediately to describe the creation of the universe. This does not signify that we have nothing to do with heaven; otherwise, it would not be mentioned at all. The grand reality of the glorious heavens is always taken for granted in biblical faith primarily because the reality of God goes far beyond the visible world. In [Genesis 2](#), in regard to the creation, it is written: “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” ([Gen. 2:4](#)). Then the Bible proceeds to teach the creation of the earth. Here again the Bible does not give a detailed account of the creation of the heavens; instead, it was taken for granted. In fact, the whole purpose for the creation of man in this universe should be to bring up children of the heavens. The invisible things are revealed only through the visible things.

Now the Bible teaches that the glory of God is far beyond the heavens. The Bible is the book which tells what has happened on the earth from the beginning to the last day. But from the first page to the last, it presupposes the reality of the heavens which encompasses the earth, the seas, and all things therein. The visible world is a smaller portion of the entire created world so that the grandeur and glory of the invisible things may manifest the greatness and glory of God. “O LORD our Lord!” the psalmist exclaims, “How excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens” ([Psalm 8:1](#)). “For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the [p. 38](#) heavens: And thy glory above all the earth” ([Psalm 108:4, 5](#)). The proper place of God is always conceived to be above the heavens, although His glory is manifested in all of His creation. “The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!” ([Psalm 113:4–6](#)). Throughout the OT it is written that His place of dwelling is in heaven, but He comes down to the earth to tabernacle. Solomon after constructing the Temple prayed to the God who hears from heaven, His dwelling place: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have builded?” ([1 Ki. 8:27](#)). The heaven of heavens cannot contain God, yet He hears “in heaven His dwelling place” the prayers offered in the Temple.

God, who is a Spirit, is invisible. Because of the invisible spiritual nature of God, the spiritual invisible realm which is directly related to Him is considered to be more primary than His visible creatures. In fact, this world is limited with finitude and consequently everything is relative. Then how absurd it is to put the ultimate reality in terms of this relative world and deny the reality of things which pertain to the spiritual and the

absolute. When it is said that “things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” ([Heb. 11:3](#)), it indicates that the primary existence and reality must be attributed with “things hoped for” and “things not seen” ([Heb. 11:1](#)), because the relative, finite, and visible things must be determined by something other than themselves.

The contemporary western theology cannot attribute to God the expression “existence.” When this is done, God is placed side by side with other existing things. Therefore, Tillich declares: “God does not exist. He is being itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him (Syst. 1. p.205). The problem arises when the modern mind ascribes the final and ultimate reality to the existence of the visible world. Biblical faith, on the contrary, views the primary and absolute reality only in God and conceives His existence above all; other created beings derive their existence only from God. It was from this secular spirit that the Confession of the U. P. Church in the U.S.A. in 1907 came to limit its scope to the world of space, time, and lifespan from birth to death and a wide complex of social relations.

In this situation, indeed, there is no way to truly overcome “the anxiety of finitude” which Tillich discusses. He cannot deny the fact that “even a physical doctrine of the finitude of space cannot keep [p. 39](#) the mind from asking what lies beyond finite space” (*ibid.*, p.190). Tillich admits “the potential presence of the infinite (as unlimited self-transcendence)” or the concept of “infinity” directing the mind to experience its own “unlimited potentiality”. Although he insists that this concept of infinity does not establish the existence of an infinite being, yet he admits that human beings cannot be content in being limited to this finite world and even experience the potential presence of the infinite. This seems to go far beyond the presupposition of the U. P. Church’s Confession of 1907.

If we limit our scope of life to the world of space, time, and lifespan, are we any different from the animals? The apostle Paul argues, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” ([1 Cor. 15:19](#)). He warns us not to be deceived. “If ... I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die. Be not deceived ...” ([1 Cor. 15:32–33a](#)).

Jesus taught that our God is our “Father in heaven”. He commands us to do our alms in secret so that “thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” ([Matt. 6:4](#)) and to pray to “thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward the openly” ([Matt. 6:6](#)). He also taught us to pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. How comforting are the words in John chapter [14](#) to the believers

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you ... and I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also ([Jn. 14:1–3](#)).

In response to this promise, Paul declared that he had “a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better” ([Phil. 1:23](#)). Therefore, He admonishes us to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” ([Col. 3:1](#)). Paul was thoroughly convinced of the matter: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” ([Phil. 3:20](#)).

What I am trying to indicate is that the modern western theologians lost a very important dimension of man, that is, the spiritual. This has been an important heritage of mankind because human beings are spiritual beings, a distinction from the beasts. The modern scientific worldview created a secularistic spirit, and so modern man has lost scope of the larger world beyond the visible world. If we recover biblical faith, we may

cure the eyes of modern man and restore his [p. 40](#) sight, "If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" ([Matt. 6:23](#)).

THE WORD OF BARTHIAN THEOLOGY AND THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

It is surprising to discover the resurgence of Barthian theology even after repeated vital criticism made by both conservatives and modernists, such as Cornelius Van Til, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, etc. It seems that the theology of "Word" has its deep root in the very heart of Christian religion. Thus, the reason for this resurgence seems to be first of all that this theology satisfies to a certain extent the conservative mind of the church which upholds the essential contents of Christian faith, that is, the Word. Secondly, this theology believes that it could successfully save the intelligence of modern man from the stumbling blocks of the outdated biblical worldview by rejecting conservative theology which upholds the authority of Scripture in all of its teachings. Helmut Thielicke in particular sharpened this point. He tries to divorce the essential point of biblical revelation, that is, the Word, from the biblical worldview. He makes an attack on conservative theology stating that it does not uphold biblical revelation in its purity because it professes to believe everything. He feels that it is meaningless to profess to believe everything in the Bible without professing a certain particular truth of the Bible or relevant way to the contemporary situation.

Neo-orthodox theology tries to distinguish itself sharply from modern theology. Helmut Thielicke sharply distinguishes between Cartesian theology (Theology A) and non-Cartesian theology (Theology B). In Cartesian theology, a thinking subject takes a primary role as the very starting point of theologizing by appropriating revelation to the measure of the thinking subject, while in non-Cartesian theology, the Word of God takes a primary role in any theological activity. Although the two theologies are sharply distinguished by Thielicke, yet both stand on the same presupposition, that is, the adulthood of man and the emancipated world of Enlightenment. Only the method of approach is different between them. Cartesian theology takes as its starting point the Cartesian ego, non-Cartesian theology, the revelation as the Word. Consequently, according to the former, the kerygmatic contents are screened out through the net of the prior conditions of the Cartesian ego. This means that the messages are put under human control and the result is that revelation loses its autonomous power and the human ego is "openly or secretly editing messages" (Thielicke, p.54). [p. 41](#)

This form of inquiry carries with it a filtering of the content of the kerygma. Only that which can become the content of my self-consciousness and which can be localized in the self and its categories is acceptable to my faith and understanding (Thielicke, p.153).

In contrast to this theological method of Cartesian theology, the theology of the Word tries to uphold the essential point of Christian religion, that is, the Word. Here in this theology, the fundamental concept of the Word actually stands as the centre and pivot around which everything turns. This fundamental concept of the Word or the Spirit seems to be sharply distinguished from the literal truth of the Bible which contains things which are unintelligible to the modern rationalistic mind. Thielicke declares:

Apart from some fundamentalists who are better Christians than theologians, there are few conservative theologians who would contest the presence of mythical elements, and hence of temporally conditional forms of expression in Holy Scripture (p.69).

The question arises from the difficulty of making a sharp distinction between the kerygma in the Bible and the mythological expression. Thieliicke formulates this question as follows:

How far the outmoded forms of statement can be distinguished from the contents stated. This distinction does not mean elimination of the forms but the need to interpret the tests expressed in them. If in the act of interpretation the invalid and outmoded form is not to be abandoned, however, it must still be separated from the permanently valid kerygmatic content (p.67).

He continues to articulate this question further in the footnote:

We have greatly simplified the alternatives here, for even if the resurrection is accepted as a fact the influence of the ancient view of the world has still to be investigated. One must still ask what is fact in the story and what is legend. Have the angels the same factuality as the empty tomb? (p.67).

The difficulty which we find here is the seriousness about the factuality of the empty tomb. If Barthians seriously believe in the empty tomb, why do they not believe in the angels? If Thieliicke is serious about Jesus walking on the sea, why can he not believe in Jesus' power to make Peter walk on the sea? Perhaps Thieliicke may be making a sharp distinction between the original creative power of the Word incarnate, which exercises its ruling authority over the raging sea, and Matthew's "interest" in the miracle itself. This theological "interest" may be considered as "the interpretative Word." p. 42 In actuality you cannot make such a sharp distinction between the theological interpretation of any "miracle" and the creative word revealed in Jesus' walk on the sea! In the last analysis, one of two positions must be chosen: either taking the entire Bible seriously in its literal sense or paying attention only to certain aspects of the total event. In this case, a sharp distinction is made between the Christ of kerygma and the historical Jesus of Bultmannians. Thus, we are again faced with the fundamental issue which the western theologians have been raising for the last two centuries: the issue of the contact point of revelation and history. Clearly Barthians want to hold to the historical revelation. If you divorce these two, you cannot avoid falling into doceticism. On the other hand, if we are going to literally adhere to biblical revelation, we cannot avoid conflicting with the scientific outlook. Therefore, in the last analysis, there seems to be no other way to solve this issue than by a critical evaluation of the scientific outlook itself.

THE ABSTRACT CHARACTER OF THE MODERN SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW

Herman Dooyeweere, a Dutch philosopher, in his monumental work on the critique of theoretical thought made it clear that the Gegenstand of theoretical analytical thought is an abstract from the concrete object of naïve experience.

The modern physical scientific worldview is nothing but an abstract world seen through the eye-glasses of mathematics and physical hypotheses. These are very useful because they are actually the normative laws by which this physical world actually operates. But when we come to the actuality of this world, even the physical objects themselves are something more than physical science can ever exhaust. Physics itself always operates on certain presuppositions. Mathematics, for example, constantly deals with the infinite number. The object which can be handled only with infinite numbers retains in itself a certain mystical element which cannot be comprehended with finite rationality. After a long struggle to construct an external world with sense data and

mathematical logic, when in confrontation with the concrete realities of our world, physical science can only stammer. For example, a small garden strip on the roadside has such an enormously complex natural reality: earth, grass, leaves, and flowers, all different sizes and irregular in their concrete particularities.

The naive scientific worldview always breaks down when it simply confronts a human being. Man can never be explained with mere [p. 43](#) physical science. Often an attempt to chemically analyze the tears of a mother is taken as an illustration of the abstract character of modern physical science. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16.26). Does a soul have any place in modern natural science? By the end of the Age of Reason, Immanuel Kant indicated that freedom puts rational thinking into a dilemma of antinomy and simultaneously postulates a new world of metaphysics which is actually beyond the boundary of theoretical reason. Now we will not compartmentalize the world of reality as some followers of Kant did, but the necessity to compartmentalize shows that our concrete world is somewhat different from that of rationalistic abstraction. Modern physics shows that all things are alike. In actuality there is nothing alike in the concrete world. Rationalism insists that the biblical message must be demythologized even though our lives are full of wonders and mysteries. Science declares that life is mechanically bound by the casual nexus of this universe. Man, as a morally responsible person, makes a solemn decision to take his course of life even in opposition to the various natural propensities of his inner urge.

THE DISASTERS OF A THEOLOGY WHICH UNCRITICALLY PRESUPPOSES THIS OUTLOOK

The above all-too-brief critical evaluation of the modern scientific outlook indicates that it must not be absolutized even in respect to our ordinary life. Then, if it is uncritically presupposed as the fundamental truth in respect to our theological perspective, how much more disastrous the results would be! Above all, its atheistic presupposition is most harmful to the modern mind in that through its influences the modern mind falls into sheer atheism or at best agnosticism. The modern mind confuses itself to become of age, forgetting about its dependence upon its Maker and Sustainer.

The fundamental issue arises from the basic differences between the two worldviews: one, the atheistic, and the other, theistic. One presupposes that this world is not created but exists of itself; the other that this world is the handiwork of the Creator who is to be glorified alone and forever. In other words, the Bible teaches that the whole world and the entire creation is to honour God who alone is to be praised forever. The modern worldview, however, deprives God of His power and His existence. Consequently, modern man who has been influenced by this view does not have the real source of [p. 44](#) comfort and hope. The God who exists in His reality and who is really trustworthy can only be the true God whose fellowship we can enjoy. Of course, modern theology made various systems of meaning in relation to Christian religion, but lacking this fundamental basis, all of them virtually fell into mere human attempts of autosoterism. If neo-orthodoxy, or the theology of the Word, takes revelation seriously as it professes to do, why does it not go one step further to accept the full authority of God in respect to His creatures, so that we can truly fear Him, worship Him, and enjoy His blessings with gratitude?

Another disastrous result of the modern atheistic worldview is that modern man loses the true Alchimedean point from which he can make a critical evaluation of the modern world. Since the modern scientific worldview is absolutized, how can man be liberated from this worldview? Consequently, the modern technological world will be left without

being healed from its dehumanizing character. Perhaps the communism of extreme monotheistic and monistic materialism may be examples of this disaster.

THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL CONCERN RECONFIRMED

Since the day of Galileo, there have been death and life conflicts between the biblical worldview and the modern scientific outlook. If we borrow Helmut Thielicke's terms, we can see that the same conflicts are still continuing between "the emancipated world" of "secularization" and "the outdated cosmology" of the Scriptures (p.11). He proposes a theology as an outcome of "confrontation between Christian truth and the modern mind" (p.23).

In the foregoing discussions, we discovered that all modern western theologies, both Cartesian and "non-Cartesian," assumed the contemporary scientific worldview as the basic premise of their cosmology, rejecting the biblical worldview as "outdated." Particularly the Barthian as well as the Bultmannian insists that it is not the intention of the Bible to enforce the biblical outdated worldview upon the modern mind. Both try to divorce the kerygma and the myth in Scripture, even though Helmut Thielicke makes a certain proposal "re-mythologizing" as a kind of compromise. But, however much compromise they may attempt between the contemporary secularistic spirit and Christian faith, as long as they reject the conservative position which tries to uphold to the traditional Christian faith without compromise, they do not come to the full satisfaction of Christian faith. [p. 45](#)

In the last analysis, with all honesty, we discover that the western theologies could not help but fall into atheism or agnosticism because of the very first presupposition. The Barthian may reject this conclusion in trying to uphold to the very essence of Scriptural revelation, that is, the creative Word. It may be so. But when it comes to the question of this world in which we live, their conclusion can be no different from the presupposed assumption. Since they presuppose the contemporary atheistic or agnostic worldview where God is either dead or silent, they come to this conclusion.

Among numerous defects involved in this kind of theology, only two have been indicated: the question of the reality of God and the loss of the invisible dimension of the biblical worldview. At the same time, I have proposed a Copernican revolution in our thinking that we may make a critical approach to the scientific outlook taking the biblical worldview as our starting point. By doing this we have argued that the contemporary scientific worldview represents only a certain abstract aspect of reality. In that world we do not have any individuality, humanity, or historical direction. On the other hand, the biblical perspective provides the modern worldview with its metaphysical basis and future in terms of God's creation, judgment, and redemption in Jesus Christ.

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN PRAXIS

Ministry. The text will not work directly to our context but only through human ministry. Ministry, however, must be God's ministry. God is the primary agent of His own work of salvation. Therefore, human ministry is subservient to God's own ministry. God calls His ministers to become His own mouthpieces. Through the preaching of the gospel, God will exercise His power to call the people to repentance and transformation and final salvation.

God-Centric View of the Historico-Cultural Context. The context must be seen primarily as being under the wrath of God because of men's perverse and depraved character both

individually and corporately together with its various manifestations in life. On the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God He will render to every man according to his deeds ([Rom. 2:5, 6](#)).

The love of God comes upon man primarily as His long-suffering and as His self-giving love was manifested at the cross of his Son. This love of God comes to our context first as the promises given through the OT prophecies of the restoration of both Israel and the Gentiles [p. 46](#) under His kingdom and then as the eschatological fulfillment of the promises in the Gospel. Even though Jesus Christ brought to us this fulfillment first spiritually, then as gradual transformation, still we must look to the final fulfillment of the promises of God that He will swallow up death in victory and wipe away the tears from all faces.

The Western theology which deals with our contemporary historical context makes exactly the same mistakes of reductionism as their systems do in general by reducing our total context into certain themes, such as “politics” in the case of Harvey Cox or “oppressor-oppressed structure” in the case of Gustavo Gutierrez. The mistake here is not in their dealing with our context in those modern aspects of life, but in reducing our context into those terms which lose sight of the God-centric view.

Therefore, the Christian principle of praxis is to repent. Repentance means primarily to turn to God. As we turn to God, our old self must die and our new self must be formed in God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ.

The denial of ourselves is the sum of the Christian life. The self-denial in relation to God leads us to a total devotion to and trust in God and the self-denial in relation to our fellow man gives us a right attitude and service to him. We must consider the present world as the place of service, even as the place where we take the cross assigned to us, with a firm conviction that “our light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, because we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” ([II Cor. 4:17, 18](#)).

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Dr. Han Chul-Ha is Dean, Asia Center for Theological Studies and Mission, Seoul, Korea. p. 48

A Latin American Critique of Latin American Theology

Samuel Escobar and Pedro Arana, Valdir
 Steuernagel, Rodrigo Zapata

THE SETTING OF THIS REFLECTION

This reflection would like to be “Evangelical” and “Latin American”, and consequently demands an explanation for our brethren in other parts of the so-called Third World. From the viewpoint of statistics, Latin America is Christian. More than 90% of the population in most of our countries are registered as Catholics in the census. Within a century after Columbus’ discovery in 1492, millions had been baptized, churches had been built in every important town and city, thousands of tons of gold and silver had been taken to the treasuries of Rome and Spain as tithes and offerings from the new Christians and several universities had been founded that had a theological school as the center of their life. It was a marvellous example of what the engineers of mission call today “Church Growth”!

Such facts explain why in 1910, when the great churches of Europe gathered in Edinburgh to consider the evangelization of the world, they discarded Latin America as a mission field. It was already Christian! It was precisely the “Evangelicals” inside the great denominations who insisted that ours were pagan lands in need of the Gospel. We thank God for them now. It was their insistence on faithfulness to the Gospel as a real mark of Christianity, rather than a naive acceptance of statistics and external signs, that explains now the existence of a growing Evangelical minority in search of identity and mission. Thus for us, faithfulness to the Gospel is a value which we place above a desire for numerical growth. That may help others to understand the nature of our theological commitment.