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EVALUATION OF NON-CHURCH MOVEMENT

There are many things that emerge from Uchimura's personality as a Christian,

1) his bold attitude in criticizing Western civilization and church denominationalism, etc. and also in taking a stand against Imperialism and Emperor-worship although he lost his position.

2) But he also had weaknesses. His influence has been rather limited to the circle of intelligent people near Tokyo University.

3) As Uchimura committed himself to the Bible and all his followers love and diligently study the Bible (many of them read the Bible in Greek), it is impossible to criticize his movement from the stand that the Bible is the word of God. It is the matter of interpretation when they deny the doctrine of the church and of the sacraments.

4) As Carlo Calderola clarifies indigenization into three categories, acceptance type, protest type and compromise type, Uchimura's theology is clarified into the protest type. Today, the world has become small and it is not the time of one-way traffic but of mutual fellowship and co-operation. The strong inferiority complex which made Uchimura's theology sharp must be re-evaluated from the perspective of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Church.

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Biblical Foundations: A Latin American Study

C. René Padilla

An *evangelical* theology can never be less than a *biblical* theology. God has spoken and his Word has been scripturated in the Bible. If theology is to keep continuity with God's Word, therefore, it must necessarily be under the authority of Scripture. An evangelical theology is by definition one that recognizes the normativity of the Scriptures in which the Evangel has been recorded. In practical terms, it is a theology which constantly takes into account the classical principles of biblical hermeneutics related to the literary context, the language, history and culture.

An evangelical theology, however, cannot be biblical in the sense of being limited to a grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. Theology includes but is far more than exegesis. It is the result of a process of transposing the Word of God from its original Hebrew or Graeco-Roman *milieu* into a contemporary situation, for the purpose of producing in the modern readers or hearers the same kind of impact that the original message was meant to produce in its original historical context.¹

¹ For a more detailed treatment of the purpose of hermeneutics, see my paper on "Hermeneutics and Culture—a Theological Perspective" in *Gospel and Culture*, eds. John Stott & Robert T. Coote (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979).

The very purpose of Scripture, according to a well-known definition of it, is “that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). If theology is to fall in line with that purpose, besides being biblical in a narrow sense it must also be communal, pneumatic, contextual and missiological—it must be biblical in a wider sense. In other words, it must take into account the whole process through which the Word of God is made flesh in the people of God within a particular historical context by the power of the Holy Spirit. *It will have a biblical foundation not only in the sense of responding to a grammatical-historical exegesis but also in the sense of being in harmony with the purpose of biblical revelation.* The present paper is an attempt to look at the various dimensions of a biblical foundation (and therefore of hermeneutics) in the light of God’s purpose in revelation and with special reference to theology in the Two-thirds World.

A biblical foundation presupposes: (1) that the purpose of the Word of God is to create a people who are distinctively God’s very own, “eager to do what is good” (cf. Titus 2:14); (2) that the comprehension of the Word of God, including both the understanding and the appropriation of the biblical message, requires the p. 80 inspiration of the Holy Spirit; (3) that the interpretation of the Word of God involves a hermeneutical circulation between the horizons of the biblical text and the horizons of the contemporary situation, aiming at “the obedience that comes from faith” (cf. Rom. 1:5); (4) that the works of love through which faith expresses itself are a witness to the power of the Word of God acting in and through the people of God. In other words, a biblical foundation presupposes communal, pneumatic, contextual and missiological hermeneutics.

COMMUNAL HERMENEUTICS

One of the most perceptive commentaries on the Gospels ever written is *The Gospel in Solentiname*, in which Ernesto Cardenal reports the comments of humble *campesinos* (farm workers) on Gospel readings. The procedure adopted at the meetings out of which these comments emerged is described by Cardenal in the following terms:

Each Sunday we first distribute copies of the Gospels to those who can read. There are some who can’t, especially among the elderly and those who live on islands far away from school. One of those who read best (generally a boy or a girl) reads aloud the entire passage on which we are going to comment. Then we discuss it verse by verse.²

Here we have a good illustration of communal hermeneutics. John Stott provides another one, taken from the experience of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin in Madras Diocese (South India):

“Once a month clergy from a group of pastorates gathered either for half a day or for a full day.” They began with “thorough exegetical study of the passages prescribed for the Sunday in question.” This was done both in plenary sessions and in groups, four or five groups being asked to prepare a sermon outline each for the Sundays of the ensuing month. “The outlines would then be submitted to the plenary for comment, criticism and discussion.” Usually, the sermon texts would be chosen from the lectionary published by the Church of South India. “On some occasions, however, especially when something of overriding importance was happening in the life of the Church or in the life of the nation ... the groups would be asked to consider what the proper Christian response to the situation should be, and what passages of Scripture would be appropriate for the worship of the Sunday in question.” Bishop Newbigin’s final comment was that, although “in the end each one had to go home and p. 81 prepare his own sermons,” yet “these exercises

² Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976), Vol. I, p.viii.

helped to ensure that there was more meat in them than would otherwise have been the case.”³

From the perspective of communal hermeneutics, the Christian community is the place where the Word of God finds its home and releases its transforming power. Such an approach is quite in keeping with the purpose of biblical revelation. No portion of the Bible either in the Old or the New Testament was written for the sake of academic theological study. Scripture was given to enable people like Irene, Teresita, Juan, Alejandro, Elvis and Laureano—members of the Solentiname community—to live according to God’s will. The gathered community of believers is meant to be the organ through which the Word of God takes up a fresh meaning in relation to a concrete historical situation.

Theology in the West has all too frequently been conceived as an academic discipline in which only a few intellectually qualified experts, who may or may not participate in the life of the church, are able to engage. Theological reflection is usually a highly individualistic enterprise, totally or almost totally unrelated to the life and mission of the church. The *novelty* of theological theories is a high priority. A theologian is a professional concerned with the interpretation and explanation of a religious tradition which does not necessarily affect life here and now. As a result, theology is divorced from the church and the Bible is assumed to be a book closed to ordinary people.

Theology as a predominantly academic (and oftentimes speculative) discipline is a luxury that we Christians in the Two-thirds World cannot afford either to produce or to import. The only theology we need and must therefore afford is one intimately related to God’s purpose expressed in Paul’s words: “I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, *together with all the saints*, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God” ([Eph. 3:17b–19](#)). Accordingly, it will have to be a theology based on a communal hermeneutics—a theology growing out (and responding to the needs) of the Christian community. As I put it in my paper on “Hermeneutics and Culture” read at the Willowbank Consultation on Gospel and Culture in 1978,

If the Gospel is to become visible in the life of *the Church, the whole* p.82 Church has to be recognized as “the hermeneutical community,” the place where the interpretation of Scripture is an ongoing process. God’s purpose in speaking through Scripture is not to provide a basis for theological systems, but to shape a new humanity created in the image of Jesus Christ. Biblical hermeneutics is a concern of the whole Church for it has to do with God’s creation of a community called to manifest his Kingdom in every area of life.⁴

Is there, then, a place for “professional” theologians? There is, provided that their role is strictly understood in relation to the life and mission of the Church. Theologians are meant to be “pastors and teachers” given by God for one purpose: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be 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 fulness of Christ” ([Eph. 4:12–13](#)).

The task of interpreting Scripture is a task of the whole Church. The biblical foundation for theology in the Two-thirds World presupposes a church that functions as the

³ John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982), pp.221–222.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.104.

“hermeneutical community”—the place where the Gospel is received not as a human word, but as it actually is, the living Word of God.

PNEUMATIC HERMENEUTICS

The Bible is not a paper pope or a book of Mormon handed down from heaven, but the inspired record of God’s revelation given in a particular historical context whose marks it bears. If people today are to hear the Word of God within their own situation, the transposition of the biblical message from the past to the present is unavoidable. How is that process possible?

Here again, the tendency in Western theology has been to answer this hermeneutical question by appealing to the scientific approach to Scripture—an approach far beyond the reach of ordinary people. The rank and file of the church can do nothing but depend on the priesthood of Bible scholars to tell them what a given scriptural passage meant in its original context and what they can believe.

The importance of the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture must not be minimized. The illumination of the Holy Spirit does not eliminate the need to study the Bible any more than his power removes the need to take medicine in the case of sickness. The fact remains, however, that the comprehension of God’s truth contained in Scripture is not merely a matter of Bible-study techniques. p. 83 Biblical scholarship is a necessary but not a sufficient recourse for that purpose. Why so?

The answer is that there is in Scripture a mystery which transcends human reason. Behind the historical records, legends, popular sayings, prophecies, traditions, gospels and letters contained in the Bible, there is a living God who has spoken and continues to speak a message which breaks through from beyond history into the human situation. Consequently, knowing God’s message is far more than mastering the biblical text. It involves a personal relationship—a relationship with the God who is behind the text. Belief in God is far more than an intellectual acceptance of biblical truth. It is, rather, a wholehearted commitment to the God of truth who reveals himself through the written Word and the Spirit of the living God (the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti*).

According to the teaching of the New Testament, no knowledge of God is possible without the hidden witness of the Spirit. As Paul puts it, “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” ([1 Cor. 2:11](#)); if we are to know God, therefore, we have to be “taught by the Spirit” (v.[13](#)). As a matter of fact, “the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (v.[14](#)). The witness of the Spirit is connected with the truth of God in such a way that no real knowledge of the truth is possible without the experience of the testimony of the Spirit in one’s heart. The inspired Word externally and the testimony of the Spirit internally are combined together in a single witness to the reality of God and his saving power. The action of the Word and the action of the Spirit are inseparable. For this reason the new birth can be alternatively regarded as “by the Word of God” ([1 Peter 1:23](#)) or “by the Spirit” ([John 3:5, 6](#)).

It follows that no true evangelical theology is possible apart from the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Doing theology is not merely a scholarly but also a charismatic task. The same Spirit who inspired Scripture in the past is the Spirit who enlightens the heart and enables it to comprehend God’s truth in the present. Consequently, the biblical foundation for theology presupposes a pneumatic hermeneutic—a hermeneutic which enables the Christian community to respond to God’s truth and to address the questions which are raised within its own concrete situation, with the freedom of the Spirit. Here

too, in relation to the hermeneutical task, Paul's dictum, that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" ([2 Cor. 3:17](#)), is applicable. p. 84

Theology in the Two-thirds World must break away from the rationalist captivity in which much of Western theology has been held. It must fully reflect the God-breathed character of Scripture and allow the Spirit to exercise his mysterious power in unexpected ways so as to challenge our theological concepts, ideological assumptions, and lifestyle, and to bring us to conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment through the Word of God. It must be biblical not only in the narrow sense of making use of the biblical text, but in the sense of allowing the written Word to be the means through which the Spirit of God communicates the new life in Christ and brings that life to maturity within each particular historical context.

CONTEXTUAL HERMENEUTICS

One of the most significant accomplishments of the Consultation on Gospel and Culture held in Willowbank, Bermuda, under the auspices of the Theology and Education Group and the Strategy Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, in January, 1978, was the placing of the contextualization issue at the top of the agenda for evangelical theology. On the question of the contextual approach to Scripture, the official report on that Consultation—*The Willowbank Report*—states: "It takes seriously the cultural context of the contemporary reader as well as of the biblical text, and recognizes that a dialogue must develop between the two." It then describes this dialogue in the following terms:

Today's readers cannot come to the text in a personal vacuum, and should not try to. Instead, they should come with an awareness of concerns stemming from their cultural background, personal situation, and responsibility to others. These concerns will influence the questions which are put to the Scriptures. What is received back, however, will not be answers only, but more questions. As we address Scripture, Scripture addresses us. We find that our culturally conditioned presuppositions are being challenged and our questions corrected. In fact, we are compelled to reformulate our previous questions and to ask fresh ones. So the living interaction proceeds.⁵

A case can be made to argue that the effort to contextualize the Gospel started quite early in the history of the Church. As a matter of fact, the New Testament provides plenty of evidence to show that the interaction between the original reality of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the historical situation in which the Gospel was proclaimed, on the other hand, started in the first century and resulted in p. 85 the diversity in unity and the unity in diversity characteristic of early Christianity. In James D. G. Dunn's words, "each community of the Spirit and each new generation of the Spirit felt the responsibility laid upon it by the Spirit to interpret the received tradition afresh and in relation to its own situation and needs."⁶ To be sure, Jesus Christ—the crucified and risen One—remained the integrative centre, the fundamental unifying element, the "irreducible minimum" in relation to which the Christian faith had to be defined and any claimant to the title "Christian" had to be judged. But the Gospel was not a static doctrinal formula but a story

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.439.

⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977), p.77.

which took new forms in new historical situations.⁷ To quote Dunn again, “the NT shows Christianity always to have been a living and developing diversity and provides some sort of norm for the ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation.”⁸

If it is recognized that the dynamic interplay between the past and the present—between the unifying centre of the Christian faith and the diverse situations in which the Gospel was proclaimed—started within first-century Christianity, there should be no difficulty in accepting that contextual hermeneutics is an essential presupposition for the biblical foundation for theology today. The task of contextualizing the Gospel is as necessary today as it was in New Testament times. Perhaps more so because of the time gap between the first and the twentieth centuries.

Now that the Church has become a world-wide community, Christians in the Two-thirds World have two alternatives before them when they come to the question of their theological task: (1) to import a brand of Western theology such as Reformed, Dispensationalist, Lutheran and at most making an attempt to “adapt” it to their own situation; (2) to struggle for a theology with a biblical foundation in the wider sense—a theology resulting from the merging of the p. 86 horizons of their own situation and the horizons of the biblical text. In light of the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the second alternative alone is in keeping with the pattern established by earliest Christianity, according to the New Testament. In other words, if theology is to have a biblical foundation, nothing less than a contextual approach to Scripture will do. Western theologies may be useful as preliminary expositions of the Christian faith, but must never be allowed to take the place of Scripture.

The contextualization of the Gospel will not consist of an adaptation of an existing theology of universal validity to a particular situation. It will not be merely the result of an intellectual process. It will not be aided by benevolent missionary paternalism intended to help the native theologians to select “positive elements” from their own historical situation which may then be used in the communication of a foreign version of the Gospel. It can only be the result of a new, open-ended reading of Scripture with a hermeneutic in which the biblical text and the historical situation become mutually engaged in a dialogue whose purpose is to place the Church under the lordship of Jesus Christ in its particular context.

MISSIOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

Finally, if theology is to have a truly biblical foundation, it will have to accept a humbler role than that of an absolute master of minds and hearts and become a servant contributing to the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The process of contextualization of the Word of God which took place in early Christianity was mainly motivated by the desire to communicate the message of Jesus Christ in meaningful terms

⁷ In his paper on “The Gospel—Its Content and Communication: A Theological Perspective,” in *Gospel and Culture*, eds. John Stott & Robert T. Coote (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), pp.135–174, James Packer develops six different ways to narrate the Gospel story, all of which are extracted from the New Testament. According to him, in each of these distinct (though overlapping and complementary) stories “is the Gospel just as all six together are the Gospel” (p. 143). Further on he adds: “As each strand of a rope is a little rope in itself, so each of these six stories is itself authentic Gospel, though the fulness of the message only appears when all six are put together” (p.148). Packer acknowledges that his “stories” are “not necessarily exhaustive” and suggests another one which could be added: “God’s Promise—the Renewing” (p. 148).

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.379.

to people living in a different situation.⁹ The basic aim was not “to do theology” *per se*, but to respond to God’s mission, to call people from among all the nations to “the obedience that comes from the faith” (cf. Rom. 1.5). The pattern for the contextualization of the Gospel in each particular historical situation and in each successive generation was thus established. A missiological hermeneutic is therefore essential to a biblical foundation for theology.

A mission perspective will maintain the balance between a proper concern for *faithfulness* to “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” ([Jude 1:3](#)), on the one hand, and an equally proper [p. 87](#) concern for the *relevance* of that faith to the concrete historical context, on the other. Whenever and wherever that perspective is absent, one of two things happens: (1) Christians are more interested in the preservation of a theological tradition than in the communication of God’s message of judgment and grace from within their own historical situation. Faithfulness to the Gospel is mistaken for an abstract doctrinal formulation unrelated to the myths, dreams, concerns, anxieties, struggles, problems, questions, values, assumptions and customs of people. The Church becomes a foreign enclave with no relevance to daily life. (2) Christians are more interested in social respectability than in the proclamation of the Word of God. The relevance of the Gospel is mistaken for the adaptation of biblical revelation to the *zeitgeist* or the spirit of the age, a mere echo of popular wishful thinking. The Church loses its distinctiveness as the community of the Kingdom of God.

A missiological hermeneutic takes as its starting point the fact that the Word of God has been given for the whole world and for all generations, and that people must therefore be invited to respond to it in their own concrete situation. From one point of view, the Word of God is relevant to every situation because it is God’s Word in Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday, and today and forever” ([Heb. 13:8](#)), and because it is addressed to sinful men and women for whom Jesus Christ was crucified and risen from the dead. Relevance is inherent to the Gospel. From another point of view, the proclamation is faithful to the Word of God to the extent that it confronts men and women with God’s Word of judgment and grace in the concreteness of their daily lives, according to the pattern set by the incarnation. Faithfulness to the Gospel demands contextualization.

If theology in the Two-thirds World is to be both relevant and faithful, it must be based on a missiological hermeneutic. Its purpose will be to transpose “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” from its original context into a new situation, with the view of manifesting the Kingdom of God in and through the Church of Jesus Christ. More than attributes of academic theology, relevance and faithfulness are characteristics of a church that expresses faith through works of love and thus bears witness to the Word of God which is active in those who believe.

In conclusion, to speak of a biblical foundation for theology is to speak of a hermeneutic which sees the Church as the hermeneutical community, the witness of the Holy Spirit as the key to the comprehension of the Word of God, contextualization as the New Testament pattern for the transposition of the Gospel into a new [p. 88](#) situation, and the Christian mission as the means through which God calls people from among all nations to the obedience that comes from the faith in Jesus Christ.

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⁹ cf. Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of Theology,” *International Review of Missions*, Vol. 64, No. 253 (January 1975), pp.37–55. For a discussion of von Allmen’s thesis, see my article mentioned in footnote 1 above.