

# **EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY**

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considered fulfilled unless and until there is teaching and discipleship. This underscores the role of theology. I agree with Imasogie that ‘mission is much more comprehensive than bringing people to initial commitment of their lives to the Christ’ (1985:369).

I am conscious of the fact that I am addressing strategists and decision makers. The question you may be asking is: How can we do what you tell us needs to be done? Let me first remind you of the need that ‘the Church must become the centre of theological instruction and discussion’ (Imasogie 1985:369). With Imasogie I am suggesting that p. 156 we should not put all our eggs in one basket. I am alarmed at the overemphasis on theological schools and institutions. That is a very narrow strategy. We should rather develop a more comprehensive strategy which includes the local church, theological training institutions as well as a vigorous programme of publications. I will leave specific discussions to you. But we need more creativity in this area.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude my presentation with a summary and a challenge. We have seen that evangelicals have been rather absent in the thirty-year debate on African theology. We have mentioned the evangelical dilemma and fragmentation as contributing factors to this loss of initiative. We have also reviewed two consequences of evangelical absence from the theological scene in Africa: evangelical theologians are forced to react because they do not participate in the public arena of debating the ideas; the lack of theology is detrimental to church growth and Christian maturity.

The situation is critical but not hopeless. It is still possible for evangelicals to recapture the initiative. As we look to future trends, evangelical theologians will need to probe into three basic problems of current Africa: cultural identity, the issue of race and colour, and the problem of poverty. Are there biblical and theological answers to these problems? Can they be dealt with in church, theological training institutions, and in society adequately? What role, if any, can foreigners play in the finding of solutions? These are the challenges for the future!

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# Creativity—Human and Divine

Harold M. Best

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*(The following is a very refreshing way of doing theology in non-theological jargon! Though written by one who is essentially a musician, yet the article contains enough theological analysis to be included in ERT. The plea here is to look at human creativity apart from modern consumerism—as a gift in itself. The seven ‘theses’ are somewhat involved by way of terminology; yet looking at ex nihilo creation, Lucifer, imitation, ... from new angles makes the reading compelling. It is interesting that the author discusses the category of*

*creativity primarily in the area of aesthetics. Hidden underneath the concepts considered here is the very basic constitution of man, as passed on from Greek thought as consisting of will, emotion and intellect. It is interesting that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, speaks of man in terms of the heart primarily. The open-mindedness of the author is heart warming. There is of course need to consider the whole area of creativity under the fall (provocatively, the author brings not creativity but imitation under the fall). In any case, in our time of utopias, projections and visions, the article raises the fundamental question concerning the nature of man: after all, if the first statement of theological anthropology is that God created man in His image, then the inference that man himself therefore is a creator is necessarily the second.)*

Ed.

It is not at all easy to construct a grounding view of human creativity based solely on the artifacts, aesthetic theories and larger cultural contexts of a collection of cultures. And it is outright foolishness to attempt this task only with one's own culture as a reference point.

The creation, God's handiwork, is the best and only pre-cultural, trans-cultural display of handiwork that we have. The whole world has the creation—is the creation—and the creation has only one Maker with only one world view. God has created—has imagined and executed—so thoroughly that to turn to human handiwork and world view before ever considering what He has done and what it means is quite possibly the reason why artistic ideology turns out so often to be crimped, insular and aloof. Between the doctrines of revelation and creation there lies a magnificent body of principle which we would do well to study.

The following will serve as a working statement for the rest of the paper:

A doctrine of the creation provides the model and God's actual creation provides the raw materials for human creativity. [p. 158](#)

It is extremely important that creativity be viewed not exclusively as an artistic trait, but as a human one. Creativity is everybody's possession. Therefore an all inclusive definition of the term becomes important. Let me try a simple one. (Although certain terminologies from here on out may have a western ring, I am quite convinced that they substantially apply to any culture anywhere.) Creativity is the ability to imagine something and then execute it. Making something without thinking it up is more properly termed crafting or fabricating. For example, an architect thinks up a building and executes a plan; craftsmen then fabricate accordingly. A craftsman may turn creative when, in the process of fabricating, he may have to think up and make a tool or a logistical system for executing all or part of the task at hand.

Technique and skill are means of executing a thought-up thing expeditiously, with efficiency, and if more than one is executed, with enough similarity to allow for interchangeability. Technology is the larger integration of technical means into an all inclusive network of effectiveness. If technique and technology are means, skill is the degree of means necessary to accomplish a task. The more sophisticated the technology and the more advanced the skill, the more capability there is for similarity or subtlety. That which is mass produced demands similarity. That which is individualized demands subtlety.

Some activities demand highly developed skills: doing a coronary by-pass or hitting a fast ball; others demand less: using a socket wrench or playing a C Major scale. By the same token, creativity can take place at a high level, composing a string quartet, or a comparatively low level: thinking up a paper clip. In each case, something has been thought up. The special quality lies in the thinking up—the imagining.

Once again, the examples I have used are western, although any set of activities from any culture may be put in their place. I used western examples because it is not within my capability to judge what is easy or difficult for another culture. Only the insiders truly know. It might even be that there are some cultures which do not differentiate between easy and difficult the way we do. Even so, I believe the concept to be fundamentally correct.

Creativity, technique and skill often get mixed up with each other, especially in the artistic world. In short, being in the arts does not necessarily mean being creative. Allow me to illustrate by using the concept of penmanship. In a broad sense, penmanship may be defined as the skill of copying anything as closely as possible, whether simple [p. 159](#) or complex, whatever the medium. Copying an intricate illuminated medieval manuscript, forging a Picasso, or attempting to copy the way a Horowitz plays Schubert, are examples of penmanship carried over into various media at exceedingly difficult levels. Those who do only these things are craftsmen or technicians who, because of the exercise of consummate skill and sensitivity in the context of artistic creativity, may be thought to be artistic or creative.

But creativity is not just skill and sensitivity, however the art world may easily confuse them. If skill is the executor of creativity, creativity is the imagined difference. Thus, Horowitz must imagine the performance of Schubert differently from Rubenstein to be considered creative. He must then possess the skill to execute this difference. If Rubenstein copies Horowitz, however difficult this may be, he is not being creative, but consummately skilful. There is, then, a difference between being musical, making music, and being musically creative.

Allow an example from outside the arts. A philosopher is skilful only if he can reason well and critique accordingly. He is creative if he imagines a new way of asking why or saying because, to which then the skill of reasoning becomes attached. In this sense, more philosophers are technicians and their work a collection of skills than is often thought to be the case. They may work skilfully within the world of ideas without necessarily having any of their own.

Here is another way to put it: there are creative persons and technician persons; better yet, poets and grammarians, in every walk of life. There are creative philosophers and technician philosophers; creative musicians and technician musicians; creative linguists and technician linguists, and so on.

This is not meant to imply that a given individual is a technician only, or creative only. Everyone, in some way, both imagines and crafts. The question is the degree to which one is more the technician or more creative, and vice versa.

It must be understood that the creative mind and the technical mind are special and necessary. It is obvious that God purposed it this way, for He thought up and crafted both kinds of doing, each important and each capable of exceedingly far reaches, each profoundly in need of the other. Humanity, not God, is in error for confusing the two, or worse, holding one or the other in suspicion. In the creational scheme of things, it is God, the All in All, Who is both the supreme imaginer and supreme technician, the consummate poet and the consummate grammarian, both the artist and the craftsman. His creation is totally at one with itself; that which is imagined 'works'. It may even be said that in the Incarnation both ways of doing were synthesized perfectly in [p. 160](#) Jesus the Man. He was at once the poet-teacher and the craftsman-carpenter.

What does the Creator and His creation show us then? Very briefly, seven things. There are more or perhaps less, depending upon how we divide, add to, multiply, or merge our concepts. But let's try these as a start. In brief, they show how human beings who think up and make things are to follow the way God thinks up and makes things. If there were

time, it would be useful to discuss the significant difference between revelation and creation, truth and beauty, or closer to home, world view and artifact. But this is another subject, just as crucial as the one at hand. Suffice it to say, I believe there are Biblical grounds for holding the position that artifacts do not contain world views.

## **I. CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY**

God creates out of nothing, of which He is not, into something, of which He is not. Man creates out of something, of which He continues to remain a part. The creation is dependent on its Creator. It lives, moves, and has its being in the One Who thought it up and made it. The creation is a community of interdependence and artifactual intercourse. Creative man is not only utterly dependent and contingent on God for what he is and how he acts, but on the creation itself, and all of its natural potential, richness, material, and process. Man is farther dependent on the unique part of creation called fellow man, on the diversity of human making called culture, and on the process and extent of human activity called history. Within these, he imagines and makes. Without these, he is helpless. His imagination and urge to shape are dependent on givens and context in order that he continue to be creative. He cannot create *ex nihilo*; he must have raw material, precedent, model, example, counsel. He must experiment, sketch, compare, reject, develop, synthesize, start over, refine, and review.

Thus, whether man knows it and likes it or not, he participates in a vast community of creativity, not just of people, but of everything. The network is rich and complex. Whether man's creativity issues in rapaciousness, for he can negatively imagine and shape, or usefulness, it is nonetheless within community. The more intelligent, the more gifted and creative man is, the more he will understand this vast intercommunal matrix; the more he will take advantage of it all.

## **II. THE IMAGINED CREATION AND HUMAN IMAGINATION**

Before the creation appeared it had to be thought up. As simple as this **P. 161** sounds, it is still the great mystery: God thinking up a giraffe, a cucumber, the overtone series, sexual reproduction, gravity, dolphins, and strawberries. He is none of these and there were none around for him to copy. There was simply no information that he could gather outside of his own imagination that would give him an inkling as to what to make and how to make it. He thought up what was not. This is every bit as mysterious as calling it forth into substance.

In a very real sense, God was the first 'abstract' non-representationalist, for that which He imagined and made did not represent anything. Each thing was, purely and simply, in and of itself, without reference. A great deal is made over non-representation, especially in the visual arts. Through a complex conceptual evolution, our culture has been taught that art should imitate, that it should be a picture OF, instead of simply a picture. The result is often judged in direct proportion to an ability to imitate or somehow be 'realistic'. If it 'looks like', it is more acceptable than if it doesn't, quality notwithstanding. People and artists thus taught are robbed of a richness. It may well be that this proclivity to imitate started with the fall, not of Adam, but of Lucifer, who wanted to be 'like the Most High'. It may well be that the urge to imitate also comes from a lack of trust, a fear of newness, a strangeness, even disturbance, which covetousness generates. By contrast, creative action finds its full merit and justification in the first day of creation when all was new and all was strange. The creative person has an obligation to continue this precept of firstness.

Creativity which imitates so effectively that the perceiver has an equal choice between the imitation and the thing imitated, is not creativity at all, but cloning.

Furthermore, the creation was not only imagined, but continued. That is, there was not just a first artichoke, but countless others, no two of which are alike. They do not imitate but re-present each other. Representing is a way of saying a thing differently each time: of saying it 'in other words'. The first tree was thought up; all others are representation. God revealed Himself in truth; all linguistic endeavours are re-presentations. Re-presenting, in a most profound sense of the word, is every bit as difficult as not representing. Once again, I want to stress that re-presentation is not imitation but creative, imaginative paraphrase.

Now the nature and extent of the creation are such that these concepts of abstraction and re-presentation may simply be different ways of going about the same thing. In other words, the only thing a creative person can achieve, even the most radically non-representational, is re-presentation. Anything anywhere ever painted, sculpted, [p. 162](#) danced, or chiseled, can only be a personal or communal stylization and extension of something already in existence, whether seen or not yet seen by the artist, because all of this is in his 'dust', and he is of the dust of all of these things. He can see into the creation without seeing all of it.

Thus, we may say that because it is impossible to step outside the creation and because God has thought up more shapes and substances than man ever can, all art is somehow re-presentative of something already in existence. Man cannot out-think God, but since he is an individual, made in the image of God, and capable of participating most profoundly in the creation, he does not necessarily have to see something before he can imagine it. This is as close as one can ever come to creating *ex nihilo*, but how delightfully close!

### III. CREATION, CREATIVE STYLE AND VOCABULARY

The creation, at first glance, appears full of anomalies. Because there are lobsters and humming birds, deserts and rain forests, turtles and men, one is tempted to believe that there are a variety of creative opinions at work—a collection of deities, if you will—either having gone into executive session and compromised with each other or having concluded their business in outright disagreement. How could the same Someone think up a hippopotamus, then turn around and imagine an orchid?

The answer to this affords another insight into creativity. There is but one God, one Author of all creation. He is changeless and proceeds unchangingly in all that He is and does. The creation, which He imagined, turned into handiwork and called good, unites and coheres in Jesus Christ. Its astonishing variety—these supposed anomalies, these stylistic nuances—really issue out of oneness and singular consistency. In short, there is a common personal style, a common linguistic if you will, a unity of process issuing in a richness of vocabulary. For it is out of a singularity of process, the way things are personally and consistently done, that individual style issues. This singularity then allows for virtually limitless variety. The singular linguistic issues in a plethora of languages.

The creation itself tells us that multiple vocabularies are not an indication of creative schizophrenia, or a compromise of personal style. The creation is our reminder that our Creator created riotously, popularly, seriously, multi-idiomatically, lumberingly, elegantly, humorously, seriously, prickly, and smoothly. And we must remember that there is no preferred part. We must return to our easels, potter's wheels, [p. 163](#) keyboards, choreographic charts, tribal dances, ethnic hymnodies to do the same. We are to observe, accept and celebrate creative man in all his creativity everywhere, all around the world,



in all its richness, variegation and dignity—just the same way we are to honour that of God.

Presently the church is employing two contradictory strategies in its missions outreach. On the one hand, it beams the gospel everywhere, forcing a kind of theological, cultural and artistic Esperanto on everyone. This kind of Christian giantism is especially hard on the backward citizens of the third world, whose poverty is so variegated, whose spiritual needs and technological inferiority are so intertwined that to transmit the gospel technologically runs the risk of equating one Messiah with another, while stridently implying that one's own indigenous ways are suspect.

On the other hand, there is the rise everywhere of indigeneity, of dignifying every tribe, every cultural style, and every creative nuance. There is an urgency among sensitive Christians that the gospel is best preached personally and contextually, that the receiving culture, with all of its creative dignity and worth, is to be honoured and preserved, and that once the people come to Christ their own art forms are the best for worshipping God. In other words, the gospel can break into any cultural system without necessarily breaking it up. The gospel is at home in the eastern highlands of New Guinea, among the native Americans, and the Bantu. Jesus wants to hear their songs, their rhythms and scale patterns, see their dances, and their art forms all turned to His praise. He wants to accept as offering every artistic style from every kind of people in the world. There is nothing in the Scriptures which suggest that God has a chosen culture.

This is the age of Pentecost, and one thousand tongues is not enough. 'O For a Thousand Tongues', in the face of New Guinea alone is an already answerable prayer. And the thousand tongues of our pentecosted church is not just a thousand spoken tongues, but thousands of sung, danced, sculpted, painted, and dramatized tongues. 'O For a Thousand Tongues' is also a ringing protest against the over-presence of non-cultural media evangelism which reduces the richness of creation and the multiple nuances of human expression down to a pitiful caricature of imagination and doing.

Pentecost as history is Babel reversed; Bible translation is Pentecost slowed down. And it is all of God. Let's be sure that we don't limit this Pentecostal outburst to language alone. Let us make sure that we open it up to all of culture and all of human creativity.

It is both culturally and theologically anomalous to assume that While preserving and honouring a culture's spoken language, we can [p. 164](#) blithely overlook its artistic languages and ship in our own hymn tunes, guitars, quarter notes, finger paintings, and films. Wycliffe, of all of God's harvesters, must have the most integrative and consistently applicable methodology known to the church. To compromise this, to question its basic work—to overlook the wonder of the slightest artistic turn anywhere, is to breach a solemn creational mandate: let a thousand tongues ring out, and ring out, and ring out again. Let us not forget that our views of worship and witness have been shaped by a western evangelical church which has not had a properly constructed theology of creativity and artistic responsibility. For us to view the arts as lead-ins, as aids to worship as behavioural devices, as means and end instead of offering, is to begin with an improper view of the arts, no matter how well we do them.

#### **IV. THE CREATION, INTRINSIC WORTH, AND FUNCTION**

Any serious discussion of the arts is bound to include the subject of function or functionalism, wherein an art piece serves a purpose to which its specific aesthetic content may be subordinate. In high western culture the concept has gradually evolved that art means itself, is inherently complete and needs little or no exterior reference to justify or explain it. Within this there are the institutionalized settings for art: concerts,

exhibits, museums, and theatres. Accompanying the doing of art is an equally enriched and fermentive world of theoretical study, scholarship, criticism, and social liturgy. It is this idea of art for art's sake—art providing for its own functional independence—which has allowed western art to variegate and develop more rapidly than that of any previous culture in history. At the same time, this phenomenon has created increasing perceptual distances between the artist and the layman.

By contrast, the functionalist maintains that the arts need not be thus isolated and singularly prescriptive, but useful, at hand, at work, and more easily understood. They are meant to unite easily with other things and functions. In so-called primitive and oral tradition cultures, this is exactly what happens. In the west, this happens as a supposed contradiction to art for art's sake. Thus, advertisers want music and art to help in the selling of a product; the church expects its art forms to serve the liturgy, even to assist in the inducement of worship, or to lead up to the sermon or another supposed structural high point. Within these and other contexts, art becomes a tool with which to do other things or to enhance their doing. It is neither an end in itself, nor contextually independent. Purely and simply, it is a means. And the p. 165 church is caught between these concepts. High art and co-functional art endure an uneasy co-existence—a combination of recital and sing along. Means, end, faith, conditioned reflex, aesthetic legalism, market research, and artistic sacramentalism vie for position depending upon the situation.

That worth and function can be united is shown in the creation itself. It is at once beautiful and useful. Each thing created has both intrinsic worth and functional value. There is not a separate 'Muzak' creation and a 'concert hall' creation, a symphony creation and a folk tune creation. A sunset is beautiful, but it is also a consortium of usefulness: clouds holding moisture, light refracted and coloured by an atmosphere to be breathed, reflecting off things which in turn are useful and beautiful. The sun warms the earth, controls its weather, gives light, and in its regular absence, allows cool and dark. However complex or extended anything in the creation is, it still functions. However simple and orderly anything is, it still has its own integrity and specific beauty, whether it is a molecule or an armidillo.

This suggests something further. Did God make certain parts of the Creation more beautiful than other parts? Is His handiwork of unequal aesthetic worth? And does it suggest a hierarchy of values? Is a cactus less beautiful than an orchid, or a platypus than a bird of paradise? Why, within a species, is one pine tree admittedly more beautiful than another? When we speak of the beauty of creation, we may really be speaking of our own favourite things, not the entire handiwork. We choose its parts the same way we choose a fugue, a sonnet, or a new dress. We, in a sense, imply that God's handiwork can be graded like a term paper. In so doing we overlook the generic wonder and beauty of creation, the sum of the essential wholeness and of each created thing. We have no more ultimate right to say that a sonnet is more beautiful than an artichoke than we do to say that classical music is preferable to that of the Usarufa, or Gothic better than Bantu.

## **V. THE CREATION AND THROW-AWAY CREATIVITY**

The concept of function and worth goes further. If a thing is intended to be used up quickly, it is most likely not to be as carefully made as that which is to 'last'. There is throw-away technology—planned obsolescence, and throw-away art—faddism. Lastingness is irrelevant; quality is in direct proportion to immediacy and early disappearance. Or, we may view a tribal artifact as transient simply because it is made by hand or improvised, or more tragically, because we have a low view of non-western creativity. P. 166



The creation is meant to be used up also. But in God's economy, the creation does not participate in the values of the throw-away. Roses wither and die, living things perish quickly, an apple which takes months to grow, is eaten in a trice. Richly grained wood is burned in the fire; fire itself, in all of its beauty, is but an instant. God thinks and works differently from man. Even though His handiwork is used up, some more quickly than the rest, every speck of it is carefully and lovingly made. The rose, the earth worm, the mosquito, and the cabbage leaf are as lovingly constructed, richly variegated, and as profoundly fascinating as a galaxy. There is no division of purpose. There are no two qualities of workmanship, one for the instant, the other for the ages. Being quickly used up does not justify being sloppily made. The integrity of the Maker never changes with the transience of the creature. There is no model whatsoever in the creation for a division between worth and function, or immediacy and lastingness.

Human creativity would regain much of its dignity if this example in the creation were followed. There would no longer be the crassness and cynicism of throw-away art, nor the pomp and pretence of art for the ages. Both are artificial, in that integrity is relativized. Each is end justifying means: the one in immediacy, the other in timelessness.

The stewardly and creative person invests time and energy intensely into the imagining and making of everything, because God alone is to be glorified and because God alone made it clear from the beginning that function, worth, usefulness and lastingness are to be conjoined in the same stewardly purpose.

## **VI. THE CREATION, SIMPLICITY AND COMPLEXITY**

Just as there p. error in the separation of worth and function, so there is in simplicity and complexity. What is simplicity? What is complexity? If complex means more and simplicity less, then Wagner's 'Tristan und Isolde' is complex and Brahms's 'Lullaby' simple. If complex means complicated and simplicity clear, then Karl Barth's writing is complex and C. S. Lewis is simple; or the Taj Mahal complex and a Dogon shrine simple.

Which of these is better? More profound? Does complexity guarantee superiority and profundity or does it simply provide a larger space within which these qualities must take place? Is a Sursurungan dance or one of Matisse's line drawings of less quality than Schubert's 'C Major Quintet' or the music of the gamelan?

Only if quality is carried out over a large expanse can complexity p. 167 make a claim over simplicity. The Mona Lisa is complex, a hymn tune simple. Each in its own way may be great; each in its own way is a mystery. The one is distinguished from the other only by the expanse of quality. To be sure, carrying quality out over an expanse is a rare and precious gift, not to be taken lightly. It is rare only in the way a galaxy is rare. Even so, the galaxy is no excuse for overlooking the blade of grass. The blade of grass and the galaxy are different only in the expanse of quality. Each is made exactly the same way: simplicities are chained together in the one case to make something small, and in the other to make something large. It is their simplest parts, the elemental particles of matter, that are yet to be explained. This is the greater fascination. Simple creativity is no less important to the whole of human creativity than the simplicities of creation are to its whole.

## **VII. KENOSIS AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY**

Finally, just as in the creation and within human creativity the simple and the complex may be joined, so in the Incarnation. In point of fact, the Incarnation is the final model for the human being, whatever he does. Kenosis is used in the great Philippians passage ([2:5-](#)

[11](#)) in describing the emptying of Christ when He became Man. This is not the place for the theological and doctrinal complexities of the Incarnation. Suffice it to say, when Christ came to earth, He somehow mysteriously limited Himself as God, yet fully remained God, while becoming fully human.

In a way, God simplified Himself. Yet this, as with so many simplicities, is the greater mystery. For all that the Incarnation means to the salvation of human kind, it means significant things for human creativity as well.

An analogy may help. If, before becoming man, Christ could be likened to an oratorio, in His Incarnation He became a hymn tune. But in this, He lost nothing of His eternal character and excellence. Becoming a hymn tune was not a compromise, a dilution, or a weakening. Nor did it mean that He refuted His being an oratorio. Rather, becoming a hymn tune was a uniqueness in itself, with its own wholeness and usefulness. It is in this way that we can once again say that a hymn tune is not a skeletal oratorio. Now we can say that it is an emptied oratorio.

There is a difference between putting something aside and losing it. Christ showed us this difference and the true artist—may I now say the servant-artist—must likewise learn this well. He must come to [p. 168](#) experience the dignity, worth and eventual joy of putting things aside, of emptying himself and taking the form of a servant. He must be able to move from the oratorio to the hymn tune, from the drama to the couplet, with grace, elegance, power, and imagination.

To lay aside is still to remain the same, as long as one's integrity, imagination and sense of excellence are at hand. The lessons of simplicity and complexity, worth and usefulness, variety and unity, familiarity and strangeness, are corollary to the lesson of laying aside. The servant-artist proceeding this way has finally learned artistic wisdom. He has acquired the gift of functional integrity the ability to maintain excellence, high purpose and artfulness in the fulfilment of any creative task in any context to which he may be called.

Which is the greater mystery, that Christ is God or that He could lower Himself while remaining God? Likewise, which is the greater mystery, that man is artistically creative or that in his creativity he may empty himself and still remain artistic? A servant-artist has his reward, just as Christ has His. Once the hymn tune has been written, the right to do another oratorio has been earned.

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## **Evangelicals, Evangelism and Theology**

### *A Missiological Assessment of the Lausanne Movement*

Peter Beyerhaus

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