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Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Biblically, Historically, Theologically, Culturally, and in Ministry in the 21st Century

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The issue of boundary definition is one of the key characteristics of Post-World War II evangelicalism. It has centred on evangelicals setting boundaries vis-à-vis both fundamentalism and liberalism.[1] But this begs a more basic question: How do we define evangelicalism? In examining evangelicalism from a sociological, historical and theological perspective, one scholar has opined that evangelicalism evinces four qualities which 'form a quadrilateral of priorities': conversionism (in evangelistic practice), activism (in mission), biblicism, and crucicentrism (as a dominant theological emphasis).[2]

Nevertheless, in order to do justice to this topic, we must situate the boundary setting of evangelicalism in the 21st century in its wider context: the development of fundamentalism (and its variants) as a worldwide socio-religious phenomenon. In the climate of inter-religious and ethnic conflict and violence, this would include the so-called culture wars in America, the ongoing conflicts in Northern Ireland and the Balkans, the Muslim-Jewish conflict in the Middle East, the Muslim-Christian conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, the Hindu-Mus-

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1 Stone, John R, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Condition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 197.

2 Bebbington, David, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (*Grand Rapids: Baker*, 1992), pp. 2f.

lim, Hindu-Sikh, Hindu-Christian, and Hindu-Buddhist conflicts in South Asia. Looked at in this global perspective, the issues of community boundaries and socio-religious and political identity are inextricably tied together.[3]

It is entirely natural for evangelicals to be concerned about boundaries at this present juncture in history because the fundamentalist/evangelical movement in Protestantism is directly related to the reaction of traditionalists to the rise of modernism (and postmodernism) as the ruling cultural paradigm.[4] The natural response is to erect boundaries in the form of various beliefs, practices and symbols to shore up an embattled worldview.[5] 'A fundamentalist movement thus originates when a self-identified group of true believers draws an ideological boundary between itself and the "other" by which it feels threatened.'[6]

While we accept the inevitability of this phenomenon, we must also be honest in acknowledging the negative ramifications, reflected in the development of the 'softer' evangelical expressions of fundamentalism.[7] But there seems to be little sustained critique of the underlying socio-cultural dynamics of evangelicalism and its fundamentalist roots. We need this to do the theological reflection needed to chart our path in the 21st century, which is so full of opportunities and challenges.

This brief paper will attempt to engage this topic in an exploratory manner, hoping to spur further thought, dialogue and action. The approach here will be eclectic, emphasizing the latest researches primarily from historical-critical and social-scientific perspectives in biblical studies and theology.

This perspective is necessary because we must admit that evangelicalism, as a Christian paradigm, is rooted in a specific socio-historical context (modernity, and increasingly postmodernity), just as Eastern and Western Catholicism are rooted in the 'Ecumenical Hellenistic Paradigm of Christian Antiquity'.[8] For good or ill '[indeed] every age has its own picture of Christianity which has grown out of a particular situation, lived out and formed by particular social forces and church communities, conceptually shaped beforehand or afterwards by particularly influential figures and theologies.'[9] For this reason it is

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3 Nielson, Nils Jr., *Fundamentalism, Mythos, and World Religions* (Albany: SUNY Press).

4 Stump, Roger, *Boundaries of Faith: Geographical Perspectives on Fundamentalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 1ff. This seminal work, focusing on geopolitical and socio-historical factors in the formation of contemporary religious movements, needs to be interacted with by evangelical missiologists and theologians.

5 Wright, N.T., *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 122-126; Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 1973). Wright's innovative construal of the concept of worldview as the matrix for understanding Christian theology, and which serves as the basis of his examination of Jesus, the Resurrection, Paul and early Christianity, is heavily dependent on the pioneering work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. It represents a bold and fruitful direction for evangelical NT theology.

6 Stump, *Geographical Perspectives on Fundamentalism*, p. 9.

7 Bloesch, Donald G., *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 8-22.

8 Kung, Hans, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 111.

9 Ibid., p. 7.

important for evangelicals to take a hard look at the issue of their boundaries, as it engages in the mission of the kingdom of God in the 21st century. We will, in turn, briefly examine the issue of evangelical boundaries from the perspective of the history of evangelicalism, the Old and New Testaments, and contemporary theological method. Finally, we will draw out some implications for Christian mission and ministry in the 21st century.

Evangelical Boundaries from a Historical Perspective

In order to examine evangelicalism's boundaries historically at the beginning of the new millennium, we must view this movement in the context of the development of fundamentalism as a modern, worldwide socio-cultural phenomenon, encompassing all major religions. While there are basic historical, cultural and religious conditions that differentiate them as an inter-religious and intra-religious phenomenon, it is evident that 'both exclusivist Judaism, Islamist Islam, and fundamentalist Christianity represent a rebellion against the modernity which threatens traditional faith. There is a concern to stop this, turn the clock back on it, in order to restore earlier religious, political, and economic conditions.'[10] Fundamentalist movements characteristically believe that without the religious certainty provided by their belief system and praxis, society will suffer a moral and spiritual decline, for it is the foundation for the society and culture.[11]

Unlike most traditional examinations of fundamentalism in general and evangelicalism in particular, which focus on the relationship between the historical exigencies of the time and the belief system of the various groups, we must understand evangelicalism in relation to a wide array of socio-cultural dynamics: the rise of modernism, secularism, cultural pluralism, colonialism and imperialism.[12] This is the context in which we are to 'exegete' evangelicalism as a worldwide, cross-cultural movement, and to consider it in terms of discussion about boundaries.

Evangelicalism (and its fundamentalist precursor) reflects the general trend of the development of fundamentalist movements highlighted by sociologists of religion. For example, the success of the revivalist movements of the 19th century in America (and Great Britain) spurred a whole religious culture of reformism in the social and political realm—from the abolition of slavery and the use and production of alcohol (temperance), to attacking political corruption, child labour and the issue of women's rights. Evangelicalism, to a large extent, set the moral and political agenda of the nation.[13] However, changes in the intellectual, socio-political, and economic landscape

10 Ibid., p. 644.

11 Stump, *Geographical Perspectives on Fundamentalism*, p. 8.

12 Ibid; also cf. Dyrness, William A., ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

13 Frank, Douglas W., *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdamans, 1986), pp. 12f.

threatened this evangelical hegemony: 'Protestant culture accustomed to deference…was now beleaguered by the combined forces of the city, the immigrant, the political boss, an elite of new wealth, and the intellectual forces represented by Darwinism and the "new" biblical criticism.'[14]

As a result, behind the claims to represent the true biblical religion, evangelicalism has also been coopted by an overly optimistic and triumphalist ideology of worldly success, often adjusting its theology to suit the values of the dominant culture. Thus by concentrating on boundaries that are a reactionary response to the loss of cultural dominance (whose values themselves represent ambivalent socio-economic and intellectual forces like capitalism, secularism and technologism), evangelicals often failed to discern how the deep theological meaning and implications of the *euangelion* ('gospel') should transform this movement. One evangelical historian, writing in the 1980s, comments how American evangelicalism, if it is to be self-critical in a biblical sense,

> would not find itself adding to the world's divisions, and thus to its violence, by proclaiming its superiority to sinful humanity, whether found in American homosexuals or Libyan terrorists or Soviet communists. It would see itself in the prodigal son, in the adulterous woman, in the pious Pharisee, in the mockers at the cross, in the stoning of Stephen. Like Paul after years of Christian experience, it would proclaim itself to be 'foremost of sinners' and thus one with the human race for whom Christ died (1 Tim. 1:15).[15]

Evangelicals of all nationalities and backgrounds must engage in the crucial work of differentiating evangelicalism as a cultural phenomenon, interacting with the geopolitical, social and economic currents of the day from the living reality of the gospel of God, for '[the] gospel stands in judgment over all human ideologies, including the ideology of cultural evangelicalism'.[16] It is ironic, yet understandable, how many western (especially American) evangelicals have often failed to grasp the theology of the cross in their implicit political and evangelistic theologies: the allure of worldly power, success and favour can even lead Christians to use the biblical tradition in a self-serving manner.[17]

While American evangelicalism has developed in a specific historical context and does not necessarily reflect the struggles and temptations of evangelicalism in other parts of the world, nevertheless it brings to the fore that all evangelicals must maintain a self-critical stance in relation to evangelical theological traditions, in dialogue with a narrative-based, NT-shaped, missional and

14 Williams, Peter W., *America's Religions: Traditions and Cultures* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 23ff.

15 Frank, *Less Than Conquerors*, p. 277.

16 Bloesch, *Future of Evangelical Christianity*, p. 5.

17 Elliott, Neil, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY, 1994).

political ethic.[18] Evangelicals 'must learn to distance both themselves and God from their own subcultures so as to be able to critically examine those subcultures rather than unsuspectingly reading both the Bible and the world through the lens of those subcultures.'[19] Otherwise, the boundaries we set among ourselves and those outside our group may be, at their deepest level, a reflection of a secular or non-Christian worldview.[20] For example, any Christian theology which supports a racial, ethnic, gender, or class based ideology as the basis for group boundaries is contrary to the gospel. The Pauline doctrine of justification by faith 'rules out any claim before God based on race, class, or gender…This was the battle Paul had to fight in Antioch and Galatia, and several other places as well.'[21] Yet in various places evangelicals have even used the Bible to justify these very boundaries.

Evangelical Boundaries from a Biblical Perspective

When attempting to examine the concept of boundaries, evangelicals ultimately must do this in relation to Scripture, for this is central to evangelical self-understanding. Phenomenologically speaking, this is true also because 'the function of tradition-scripture-canon has largely been to answer for the believing communities the two essential questions of identity and lifestyle.'[22] But this forces us to ask the question: Do evangelical claims about Scripture (which functions as a theological linchpin of evangelical boundaries) 'amount to the affirmation of the inerrancy of the evangelical tradition, where evangelicals ought to be affirming the inerrancy of Scripture'?[23] This section of the paper will dialogue with contemporary biblical studies to help us flesh out the issue of how community boundaries are drawn, and on what basis.

When the Bible is viewed as a complex grand epic of YHWH's saving relationship with the world through Israel, and ultimately through Jesus, we see that the God-question becomes the main focus of Scripture.[24] The whole array of theological and ethical questions, including the one regarding the boundaries of the people of God, has a centrifugal

18 Cf. Hays, Richard B., *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996); Spohn, William C., *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 1999); Sine, Tom, *Mustard Seed vs. McWorld: Reinventing Life and Faith for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); Crysdale, Cynthia, *Embracing Travail: Rethinking the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum, 1999); Gorman, Michael J., *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

19 Volf, Miroslav, 'Teachers, Crusts and Toppings', *Christian Century* 113/1 (1996), p. 133.

20 Clarke, Andrew D., *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (AGAJU XVIII); Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 19.

21 Wright, N.T., *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 160.

22 Sanders, James A., *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 28.

23 McGrath, Alister E., 'Evangelical Theological Method: "The State of the Art"' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 31.

24 Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 471-476.

relationship to theology proper (i.e., who God is). So the operative question becomes: What demarcates the people of YHWH in both the Old and New Testaments in relation to YHWH's salvific purposes for humankind and the cosmos?

The main belief of Judaism issuing from the OT was monotheism, embodied in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4). It asserted that the God who created the world and its peoples is in a special, covenantal relationship with Israel: 'The creator calls a people through whom, somehow, he will act decisively within his creation, to eliminate evil from it and restore justice and peace.'[25] Within this understanding of Israel's vocation as YHWH's people—in light of the challenges of persecution and apostasy from pagan nations—is the tension between YHWH as the universal creator at work in the world (creational monotheism) and the salvific intent of Israel's vocation under YHWH, which is constantly under threat (covenantal monotheism).[26] This is reflective of the fact that 'Israel's religion, and thus the texts are incessantly pluralistic. On every religious question the matter is under dispute, and we frequently are able to identify the several voices to the adjudication that are sounded in the text. This process, moreover, applies not only to this or that subject, but to the very character of Yahweh, the God of Israel.'[27]

There is this dual emphasis of creational and covenantal monotheism in the book of Jonah, for example. The critical consensus is that Jonah was written during the Persian period during the 4th century B.C.[28] Jonah 'conveys the idea of a deity who responds to the plight of the non-Israelite and Israelite alike .The book of Jonah appears to be a cautionary challenge to standard theological formulations.'[29] *In nuce*, this book attempts to 'convert' the Israelites to a more universalistic view of YHWH's relationship to the nations, in a context where there would be a natural tendency to view YHWH as primarily centred on their survival as the beleaguered people of God.

The fact that the Bible consists of theological voices that are often in tension with others and vie for dominance means that there is a 'catholicizing' or inclusive thrust to the canon, and the traditions it incorporates.[30] Thus, if evangelicalism's ethos is to be truly biblical, it must reflect this canonical theological inclusivity. Wrestling with this will help evangelicals to view their intra-group and inter-group boundary definition as an 'ongoing work of adjudication, in which any settled point is reached only provisionally and in

25 Ibid., p. 252.

26 Ibid., pp. 248-50.

27 Brueggemann, Walter, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 64; for the NT cf. Dunn, James D.G., *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, rev. ed. (London: SCM Press, 1990).

28 Bright, John, *A History of Israel* 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 431.

29 Birch, Bruce C., Terence E. Fretheim & David L. Peterson, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), p. 429.

30 Albertz, Rainer, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament, Period 2: From the Exile to the Maccabees* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), p. 481.

turn is subject to reconsideration'; this 'ongoing adjudication is faithful to the character of the [biblical] text itself'.[31]

One cannot discuss the issue of boundaries as it relates to the NT without understanding the socio-cultural and political dynamics from the time of the two exiles. It only intensifies. The Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods in Palestine were marked by the challenge of Hellenization and political uncertainty. These pressures led to an emphasis on group boundaries and the formation of various Jewish parties or sects, as different groups reacted differently to the threat of religious, cultural, and political assimilation.[32] The upshot of all this is that the intra-religious boundary setting of the time, as a response to the ambiguities of the 2nd century B.C., 'created the pluriform Judaism known by Jesus and Paul'.[33]

We must realize that, in some sense, the Jesus movement was a sectarian response to the ongoing crisis of socio-political oppression and the hope for YHWH's salvation in Jewish Palestinian society during the Roman era. Thus the basic existential concerns, which led to further group definition, had to do with the following issues: 'How and when Israel's God would rescue his people were questions whose answers, reflecting different perceptions of what it meant to be the people of the covenant God, divided one Jewish group from another.'[34] The Pharisees, for instance, who have been traditionally characterized by their hyper-scrupulosity in terms of ritual purity and legalism (cf. Mark 2:23-3:6), had a much deeper *modus operandi*: a theologically-based political resistance to Roman rule. This held true, in different ways, for the 'houses' of Shammai and Hillel.[35] In this time of the threat of assimilation, the religious symbols of 'Temple cult, and the observance of Sabbaths, of food taboos, and of circumcision, were the key things which marked out Jew from Gentile, which maintained and reinforced exactly the agenda, both political and religious of the hard-line Pharisees'.[36]

Jesus' eschatological teaching concerning the inauguration of the kingdom of God led him to a 'radically different interpretation of Israel's ancestral tradition. Jesus, precisely in affirming Israel's unique vocation to be the light of the world, was insisting that, now that the moment of fulfillment had come, it was time to relativize those God-given markers of Israel's distinctiveness.'[37] Thus, theologically speaking, Jesus' eschatological focus and programme rightly maintained the centrality of the creational monotheistic vision as the goal of covenantal monothe-

31 Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 64.

32 Cf. Koester, Helmut, *Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. 1: History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 197-235.

33 Wright, *New Testament*, p. 159.

34 Ibid., p. 167.

35 Ibid., p. 201.

36 Wright, N.T., *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 384.

37 Ibid., p. 389.

ism.[38]

Because, as we have observed, fundamentalist movements arise in situations where traditional socio-religious worldviews are being challenged, the problem of evil is usually projected onto the evil forces behind those outside the boundaries of the community. But in the case of 1st century Jewish Palestine, Jesus' understanding was somewhat atypical: unlike many who would posit 'Evil' motivating their pagan enemies, he believed that 'the Israel of his day had been duped by the accuser, the "satan". That which was wrong with the rest of the world was wrong with Israel, too. "Evil" could not be conveniently located beyond Israel's borders, in the pagan hordes. It had taken up residence within the chosen people.'[39]

Recent researches into the social history of the Galilee of Jesus' time give us some idea of the nascent socio-economic and cultural pressures that illuminate his proclamation of the renewed Israel and its community boundaries.[40] The integration of the Galilee into the Roman 'global' market economic system, exemplified by the development of the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias, was a challenge to the traditional agrarian subsistence economy and its social system, which was based on the 'Jewish patrimonial ideal, as it had been enshrined in the Pentateuch, upheld by the prophets and re-enacted by reformers such as Nehemiah (Neh. 5:1-11)'[41] This led to a heightened tension between the so-called Herodian and Jewish theocratic ideals of the social order. It appears that Jesus, cognizant of both the negative assimilationist and revolutionary tendencies with these respective socio-economic systems, charted a different path which affirmed the true intent of the kingdom of God: a new way of being the people of God as the light of the world, based on the old but transcending it. 'In proposing such an ideal Jesus was not seeking to revert to the *status quo ante* for Israel as stated in the Pentateuch, but was operating within the framework of adapting the received tradition to the demands of a new situation, and doing so in the name of God's final prophetic word to Israel.'[42]

This results in a revolutionary response to the question of community boundaries, embodied in the kingdom stories (viz. parables) he told. For instance, the parable of the Good Samaritan has to do with the fact that '[loving] Israel's covenant

38 Glasser, Arthur F., *Kingdom and Mission* (SWM; Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), pp. 122-135.

39 Wright, *Jesus*, p. 389.

40 Cf. Crossan, John D., *The Birth of Christianity* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), pp. 230-235; Stegemann, Ekkehard and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), pp. 129-136. While one may disagree with some of the findings of these works due to their particular use of certain sociological and anthropological models in analyzing the NT and the social history of Jewish Palestine and the Greco-Roman world in the first century, the goals and approaches they employ are certainly valid and illuminating.

41 Freyne, Sean, 'Galilean Questions to Crossan's Mediterranean Jesus' in *Whose Historical Jesus?*, ed. William E. Arnal and Michael Desjardins (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1997), p. 87.

42 Wright, *Jesus*, p. 307.

God meant loving him as creator of all, and discovering as neighbours those who were beyond the borders of the chosen people. Those who followed Jesus in this way would be "justified"; that is, they would be vindicated when the covenant god acted climactically within history.'[43]

In terms of Pauline studies and the issue of community boundaries, there is not a more important evangelical theological boundary marker than 'justification by faith'.[44] Traditionally, Protestants (including evangelicals) have read this Pauline terminology as denoting 'the means by which man's relationship with God is established'.[45] Justification by faith was understood in contrast to the legalistic nature of the Judaism of Paul's day, whereby one earned one's salvation by works. Martin Luther saw in his time a similar theology in Medieval Catholicism. He appealed to Paul's insight as a breakthrough in his own spiritual struggles.

In the last twenty-five years there has been a revolutionary change in the interpretation of 1st century Judaism, Paul and justification. In Protestant Christian circles, E.P. Sanders' work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, offered the opinion, after examining a wide array of evidence, that Jewish soteriology is to be understood as based on the grace of YHWH's covenant. One stayed in a right relationship with YHWH by obedience to Torah. Therefore one must speak of Jewish soteriology as covenantal nomism.[46] Many evangelical biblical scholars, having looked at the same evidence, have called this thesis into question.[47] But more have accepted it (with criticisms), and gone about articulating its implications for Pauline theology and Christian doctrine.[48] Eminent evangelical biblical scholar N.T. Wright states that 'until a major refutation of [Sanders'] central thesis is produced, honesty compels us to do business with him. I do not myself believe such a refutation can or will be offered; serious modifications are required, but I regard his basic point as established.'[49]

In this new scheme, then, what

43 McGrath, Alister, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

44 McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp. 2f.

45 Sanders, E.P., *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 420.

46 See those who advocate the 'new perspective' on Paul and Judaism cf. Dunn, James D.G., 'The New Perspective on Paul' (with Additional Notes) in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), pp. 183-214; Wright, N.T., *What Saint Paul Really Said*; and Mattison, Mark, *The Paul Page*, http://www.angelfie.com/mi2/paulpage/. On the contrary (traditional) view cf. Sefrid, Mark, *Justification By Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (NovTSup 68; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Westerholm, Stephen, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 105-197; and Carson, D.A., Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Sefrid, eds., *Variegated Nomism,, Vol. 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).

47 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 20.

48 Ibid., p. 117.

49 Abegg, Martin, '4QMMT, Paul and the Works of the Law' in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape and Interpretation*, ed. Peter T. Flint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 203-216. For a less successful analysis of 4QMMT that supports the traditional (Lutheran) understanding of Paul and Judaism, cf. McDonald, Lee M. & Stanley Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), p. 360.

does justification mean? And how does this affect evangelical boundaries? Wright believes that evangelicals have misunderstood Paul by reading him through the lens of Reformation (viz. Lutheran) theology:

> Paul may or may not agree with Augustine, Luther, or anyone else about how people come to a personal knowledge of God in Christ; but *he does not use the language of 'justification'* to denote this event or process. Instead, he speaks of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, the work of the spirit, and the entry into the common life of the people of God.[50]

Justification, in contrast, in its Jewish setting, had to do with the eschatological vindication/acquittal of the people of YHWH, which was now understood to be affected by God in Christ through the resurrection (with the full manifestation to come at the end of the Age). The eschatological understanding of this term, with its conceptual roots firmly planted in Jewish apocalyptic, has been confirmed by an examination of 'justification by works' in 4QMMT (Miscat Masseh ha-Torah), a recently discovered and translated document from the Dead Sea Scrolls.[48] As a result of a contextual examination of this phrase (the only time it is attested outside Paul), it is confirmed that it has to do with *'how you tell who belongs to the community,* not least in the period before the eschatological event itself, when the matter will become public knowledge…In standard Christian theological language, it wasn't so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.'[51]

Because justification means that all those who exercise faith in Christ are vindicated/declared righteous now, that is, they are part of the eschatological people of God, it had the effect of redefining the boundaries of the people of God, from a more religio-ethnic one to an inclusive one, based on faith in Christ (cf. Gal. 2; Rom. 14-15; Eph. 1-3). Thus justification should be understood as the 'ecumenical doctrine'. 'It cannot be right,' opined Wright 'that the very doctrine which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong at the same table (Galatians 2) should be used as a way of saying that some, who define the doctrine of justification differently, belong at a different table. [It] rebukes all our petty and often culture-bound church groupings, and declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in one family.'[52]

Evangelicals, who are very vociferous about their fidelity to the Reformation heritage, will question the wisdom of blurring or sacrificing this particular theological boundary marker. But Wright correctly makes the point that 'one is not justified by believing in justification by faith. One is justified by believing in Jesus.'[53] Therefore as Anglican reformer Richard Hooker taught, many pre-Reformation people (and non-evangelicals today?) were justified because they trusted in Jesus, even though they might not have known

50 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 119.

51 Ibid., p. 158.
52 Ibid., p. 159.
53 Ibid., p. 159.

of, understood, or necessarily agreed with the Reformation doctrine as such.[54] If this is so they must be considered within the bounds of the Christian family and must be treated as such, whether or not we would feel comfortable affixing the label 'evangelical' to them.

While abstract doctrinal formulations regarding theology, christology, eschatology and certain moral issues tend to predominate in defining evangelical boundaries, for Paul a community ethic, based on the theological implications of the self-sacrificial life of Jesus, was one of the main foci of his boundary setting activity in 1 Corinthians.[55] The problem of boasting, parties and emphasis on 'wisdom' reflects a social context in the highly competitive atmosphere of the Roman colony of Corinth where 'the basis of the parties is the secular practice of aligning oneself with someone of established status and reputation in order to advance one's status. This has been clearly seen in the dynamics of patronage, politics, and sophistic practices.'[56] Evangelicals have been very astute in adopting the technology and means of communication to advance the gospel of Christ. But has there been the requisite effort to discern how the worldly wisdom and practices concomitant with it are in agreement with the spirit of Jesus? Thus in the West, and increasingly in the Two-Thirds World,

> Church leaders may be incapable of recognizing the threats to Christian practice and life because they are remaking the Church in the image and likeness of the global culture industries…As they begin adopting the techniques, worldviews, and, criteria of advertising/marketing and mass commercial media, Church leaders make it more likely that whatever elements of gospel non-conformity and radical discipleship yet endure will be buried beneath the data of focus groups, Q-scores, psychographic profiles, and multimedia campaigns.[57]

From a brief examination of the biblical evidence, from a socio-historical and social-scientific perspective, we have seen that the issue of community boundaries, socio-cultural context and theology are inextricably tied together. Hopefully, this will encourage evangelical leaders to show more insight in exegeting, not only the Bible, but its contexts responsibly as we struggle to carry out God's mission in a world where economic and cultural change will inevitably lead to reactionary responses by traditionalists of all religions in the world. This is not a new phenomenon; the Bible itself testifies to this dynamic. Now we will examine how evangelical boundaries have been affected by the interplay of the modern and postmodern intellectual and social context with the evangeli-

54 Cf. Barclay, J.M.G., 'Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First Century Judaism and Christianity' in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, ed. David G. Horrell (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), p. 305.

55 Clarke, Andrew C., *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, p. 107.

56 Budde, Michael, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p. 104.

57 Cf. Murphy, Nancey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

cal theological tradition.

Evangelical Boundaries from a Theological Perspective

While the critical rereading of biblical texts has helped us to define and refine the concepts of boundaries in the biblical tradition, it can be argued that one of the greatest challenges to evangelical boundaries comes in the form of shifting philosophical paradigms that set the agenda for theological discourse, because, unlike the Bible, evangelicals do not give as much place explicitly to the concept of tradition and its philosophical underpinnings as a source of authority. Thus this tends to be a blind spot that affects the concept of evangelical boundaries.[58]

This is an important matter since many traditional evangelical doctrinal formulations which have tended to demarcate its boundaries are themselves grounded in post-Enlightenment realist philosophy, namely the Princeton theology of Charles Hodge and his followers.[59] Inasmuch as fundamentalism and evangelicalism are a reaction to modernism, this has arguably led to an imbalanced, speculative doctrine of Scripture and an attenuated doctrine of the Holy Spirit.[60] 'Although fundamentalists typically adhere to a wide range of beliefs and practices, they often focus on a few select issues. Rather than espouse a wholesale return to a traditional past…, fundamentalists concentrate on what they consider to be most important features of that past in defining the ideological boundary that separates them from others.'[61]

This phenomenon has recently been intensified in a context where radical constructivist and pluralist notions of truth are increasingly viewed as hostile to evangelical doctrine, epitomized, for example, in David F. Wells' book, *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*[62] It can be argued that this evangelical theology, based on a realist, foundationalist philosophy, which is still regnant among laypersons and most scholars, is used as a ideological boundary between itself and theological liberalism, while often seemingly unaware that its language and formulations are 'modern' too. What is happening though, in some scholarly evangelical circles, is a real critical engagement with contemporary intellectual currents, fully cognizant of evangelical distinctives and the biblical heritage.[63] We will take this important development up presently.

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58 Grenz, Stanley, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Bridge Point, 2000), pp. 70-73.

59 Ibid., pp. 141-144;148-150.

60 Stump, *Boundaries of Faith*, p. 11.

61 Wells, David F., *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

62 Cf. Hauerwas, Stanley, Nancey Murphy & Mark Nation, eds., *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice & the Future of Theological Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994); Stackhouse, John G., ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation in Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Grenz, Stanley, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Bridge Point, 2000); Murphy, Nancey, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

63 Grenz, *Renewing the Center*, p. 72.

In this section we will look at several areas of revisioned evangelical theology and their implications for evangelical boundaries. First, there is the fundamental question that impacts our inquiry: What is evangelical theology and how do we conceive of it? A dominant strand of evangelical thought has posited a realist, foundationalist epistemology, which saw the propositional truths of the Bible, literally understood, as its source. The organization of these truths into a rational theological scheme, according to traditional Christian dogmatics, was the basic method and mode of discourse.

Thus the great theologian [Charles] Hodge 'patterned his work after that of the scientist. Just as the natural scientist uncovers the facts pertaining to the natural world, he asserted, so the theologian brings to light the theological facts found within the Bible.'[64] Likewise, '[the] quest for scientific theology required an unassailable foundation, one that could endow the theological construction with epistemological certitude when subjected to the canons of empirical science.'[65] Philosophically, this is the basis of the 'modernist' doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture and its refinements, which still serves as a defining theological boundary marker for most evangelicals.

It is clear that this way of doing theology (and many of its resultant doctrinal formulations) was essentially enthralled to the prevailing secular philosophy of the time. For evangelicals to make this theological method—and the doctrinal formulations flowing from it—indispensable evangelical identity markers is to confuse the Word of God with the fallibility of human wisdom, and undermines the Protestant emphasis on the necessary self-critical stance we must take vis-à-vis Scripture. Thus 'evangelicals, of all God's people, cannot allow revelation to be imprisoned within the flawed limits of sinful human reason'.[66]

It was precisely the notion of a universal, objectivist rationality that postmodernism has challenged. Philosophers like Alasdair McIntyre showed that human rationality is a 'tradition-constituted rationality', dependent upon the justification of particular communities of discourse.[67] Some evangelical theologians have worked assiduously in articulating what a proper evangelical theological method should look like in a postmodern context, aware of the need for a critical engagement with this particular intellectual and cultural context also.[68]

Some of the more exciting proposals for an evangelical theological method refocus on the narrative grammar of the story of Scripture as

64 Ibid.

65 McGrath, Alister E., 'Evangelical Theological Method: "The State of the Art"' in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation in Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 33.

66 Murphy, Nancey, 'Introduction' in Hauerwas et al eds., *Without Foundations*, p. 17.

67 Cf. Vanhoozer, Kevin, 'The Voice of the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal About the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology' in *Evangelical Futures*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, pp. 61-106.; Work, Telford, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

68 Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 131-137.

a key element in evangelical self-understanding and boundary making, within the church's ethical, catechetical and missional vocation.[69]

> Evangelical theology deals not with disparate bits of ideas and information but with an all-embracing narrative that relates the unified action of God. What the evangelical theologian ultimately wants to say about x, y, and z stems not from isolated word studies but from substantial reflection on the meaning of what God has done through Christ to create and recreate the world. The Bible is not a theological dictionary but a theological drama, and it should be used as such.[70]

What about the notion of biblical authority, in which the doctrine of inerrancy or infallibility serves as an evangelical boundary marker to safeguard against a lapse into theological relativism? NT theologian N.T. Wright's non-foundationalist construal of this doctrine attempts to articulate a more 'biblical' notion of Scriptural authority derived from the narrative grammar of the Bible as a grand epic. He believes that the Bible's authority should be conceived like that of an unfinished multi-act play with the normal development of the plotline, in which the actors must improvise the unfinished act before the final act, based on the 'authority' of the previous acts.[71]

Specifically, Wright envisions the biblical epic in five acts: creation; fall; Israel; Jesus; church. The writing of the NT would be the first scene in the act, with some parts of the NT (e.g., Rom. 8 and 1Cor. 15) adumbrating the end of the drama. Christians live under the authority of the earlier acts, with the requisite sense of plot development. Therefore a faithful performance of the story cannot consist of repeating the previous acts.[72] Thus '[we] are not searching, against the grain of the [biblical] material, for timeless truths. We are looking, as the material is looking, for and at a vocation to be the people of God in the fifth act of the drama of creation.'[73] As a result, in this model there is a shift from a modernist, foundationalist appeal to the 'scientific' reliability of the Bible, to a more biblical understanding of Scripture as God's story with the world, 'focused on Israel and thence on the story of Jesus, as told and retold in the Old and New Testaments, and still requiring completion'.[74] It brings to the forefront YHWH, the God of the Bible, who promises redemption, and is bringing it about through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in and through the church.

This orients us to the missiological impetus of God's work reflected in Scripture and away from fruitless, speculative theories about the Bible, about which the Bible itself (and hence YHWH) is not concerned. As such, these should be questioned as evangelical boundary markers. This is true inasmuch as the Bible is a '*norma normans non normata*, a norm that norms but has not itself been normed, a source of authority that provides the standards of judg-

69 Vanhoozer, 'Voice of the Actor,' p. 64.

70 Wright, *New Testament*,140; Vanhoozer, 'Voice of the Actor,' pp. 98-101.

71 Wright, *New Testament*, p. 142.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 143.

74 Griffiths, Paul J., 'The Proper Christian Response to Religious Pluralism', *Anglican Theological Review* LXXIX/1 (1997) p. 15.

ment for us, but that is itself not subject to standards of judgment extrinsic to it.'[75]

In the end evangelicalism always comes back to the centrality of the *euangelion* ('gospel') as the climax of God's work in redemption. It is regrettable but true that some evangelicals have not often had to take a hard self-critical stance in order to come to terms with their heritage; that time is now past. This exercise in rereading biblical texts and engaging in socio-historical analysis to help us understand evangelical boundaries must be fleshed out in terms of our present day agendas. This is our next destination.

Ministry Implications for Revised Evangelical Boundaries

Space limitations and the nature of the inquiry in these days mean that an extended coverage of the ministry implications of this topic will be brief. As a result, the following comments will not be of the 'how to' variety or concern specific policy prescriptions; they will deal more with a 'grammar' or hermeneutic of evangelical Christian existence and praxis for the 21st century. The postmodern turn in philosophy and theology has rightly eschewed 'one-size-fits-all' theologies; they are to be understood as largely culture specific. Thus how we do ministry, to a great extent, will be affected by the cultural, socio-political, and economic milieu. As Paul did, we must learn to critically reflect on Jesus' kingdom proclamation, life, death and resurrection and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allow our communities to do the work of incarnating this way-of-being-in-the-world in our diverse cultures and contexts (cf. Philp. 2:1-2).[76]

Given this reality, we must assert that truly there is no such thing as (nor has there ever been!) a non-contextualized gospel. For example, we have four gospels in the NT, reflecting four contextual understandings of what God has done in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Thus the real issue for evangelicals, in terms of defining their boundaries, has often been to reidentify as 'biblical' the contextual application of certain theological principles and practices, which are to be understood in the context of fundamentalists/evangelicals defining them selves polemically against others, as we have noted.

The danger is that there has not at all times been the self-critical stance toward the in-group to see if it has been faithful to its own reputed Scriptural self-understanding, or whether it has on occasion confused being biblical with reflecting the cultural or pragmatic concerns of its given context in ministry. For example, the growth and vitality of the evangelical church in South Korea has been lauded worldwide by western missiologists and church growth experts. It is truly remarkable what

75 Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 198.

76 Suh, David Kwang-Sun, *The Korean Minjung in Christ* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 1991), p. 116.

God has done there! But recently both Korean and western scholars and church leaders have taken a closer look at this phenomenon and have come to some searching conclusions. The Korean church may have come close to compromising the evangelical boundary of religious syncretism by assimilating the modus operandi of shamanism, the traditional folk religion of Korea. In the words of one Korean scholar,

> Korean Protestantism has almost been reduced to a Christianized *mudang* religion. That is, the form and language of the worship service are Christian, but the content and structure of what Korean Christians do are basically *mudang* religion. Although missionaries rejected shamanism and thought it had been destroyed, Korean Christianity has become almost completely shamanized.[77]

This *mudang* orientation particularly manifests itself in the intense spirituality geared towards the acquisition of material wealth and well being. This has led Jae Bum Lee to observe that 'participants are strongly motivated to individual interests and do not pray for others…and probably half are motivated by magical interests',[78] Another scholar has gone as far to say that Korean Pentecostalism reflects 'a truncated version of the Gospel that has eliminated personal and public discipleship'.[79] These indictments may appear harsh and judgmental but if evangelicals are to take their heritage seriously, then they have to exercise a vigorous self-critical biblical and theological stance if its boundaries are to have biblical and theological integrity.

The question that must be asked of the South Korean evangelical church (and, in different ways, of others around the world too) is: How does a Christianized form of *mudang* religion square with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, with its call to a sacrificial life for believers within the church, the community of Jesus (cf. Mark 10:17-45; Mt. 5-7). This theme is also central to every strand of the NT (cf. Rom. 12,14; 1 Cor. 1:10-3:21; 1 Pet. 4; 1 Jn. 3:11-4:12; Heb. 13:1-7; James 2, 4, 5 etc.). Strengthening this understanding is the seminal work of NT scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, whose examination of *soteria* ('salvation') and its cognates in Luke-Acts and Paul leads him to state that 'salvation means belonging to the remnant people God is creating out of Jew and Gentile in the present season. For Luke and Paul, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus ['there is no salvation outside of the church']* would not only be true but tautologous.'[80]

In other words, if salvation has to do with one's status in the true community of God, then that means that

77 Lee, Jae Bum, 'Pentecostal Type Distinctives and Korean Protestant Church Growth,' Ph.D. dissertation, School of World Mission (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1986), pp. 154-157.

78 Mullins, Mark R., 'The Empire Strikes Back: Korean Pentecostal Mission to Japan' in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. Karla Poewe (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), p. 98.

79 Johnson, Luke Timothy, 'The Social Dimensions of *Soteria* in Luke-Acts and Paul' in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1993* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), p. 536.

80 Aune, David E., *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52a; Dallas: Word, 1997), p. 104.

we must pay particular attention to the paradigmatic narrative ethics of the Gospels and Paul, which help us define what evangelical boundaries are in various contexts. When we think of salvation as largely extrinsic to community or social ethics, then we tend to evaluate many of the cultural belief-systems and practices around us (usually excluding gender and sexual ethics!) as *adiaphora,* and thus worthy of assimilation to further the gospel in a given culture. But when we look at the NT critically, we see how deeply Paul and the other writers thought about the theological nature of what was central to the faith—issues that impinged upon theology, christology and what it means to be the community of the kingdom of God in Christ.

A small example would be Revelation 1:18d, where the risen Jesus says he has ' the keys to Death and Hades'. This imagery is not found in the OT; and 'in early Jewish underworld mythology, the netherworld is not thought of as having doors or gates'.[81] Surprisingly, this image of the Risen Christ in Revelation (which is one of the most fiercely Jewish monotheistic books in the NT) is drawn from popular Greco-Roman conceptions of the goddess Hekete, the regional deity in the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor), who was worshipped as the queen of the cosmos. She was associated with Selene/Luna in heaven, Artemis/Diana on earth, and Persephone/Proserpina in Hades, where she had the name keybearer (Gr. *kleidouchos*).[82] Perhaps this image was used by the author of Revelation to impact believers living in the socio-religious context of the Roman province of Asia, where the book was probably written, to signify that, in his death and resurrection, Jesus had assumed the role held by Hekete in the popular imagination.

What is interesting from the perspective of our inquiry is that this assimilation of the function of Hekete to Jesus is truly subversive: Jesus is the 'king of the cosmos' because of his sacrifice on Calvary and his subsequent resurrection by YHWH. Thus the story of Jesus and the theology of the cross and resurrection is not compromised. This dynamic is repeated time and time again in the NT. If our theological reflection for our preaching, teaching and praxis is done at the level of citing proof texts from Scripture, then we will miss the deep theologizing implicitly reflected in the boundaries evinced in the NT, done in reference to the socio-religious, political and economic currents of late Greco-Roman antiquity.[83]

In conclusion, there are no easy universally applicable answers to the

81 Ibid.

82 In order to see how NT boundaries are variously defined in Luke-Acts, Paul and the Pastoral Epistles in relation to the religion and political theology of the Roman Empire cf. Wright, N.T., 'Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire', presented at the Center for Theological Inquiry, Princeton, NJ: http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/wright.htm and Bonz, Marianne P., 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ vs. the Gospel of Rome', presented at the WGBH Lowell Institute Symposium at Harvard University: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/symposium/gospel.html .

83 Cf. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*.

question of defining evangelicalism's boundaries in the 21st century. Why? Because, as we have shown, both the OT and the NT exhibit a diversity of construals of what it means to be the people of God in different contexts, even though there is continuity in the grand epic of the story of YHWH with his people in the Bible.[84] Also, we must recognize how often our vision of who we are in relation to God and the world is blurry and myopic. Thus defining our boundaries will often be a painful dialogical process as we wrestle, as the early church did, with the basic issues of identity in our changing world. What is required of us is better critical exegesis of our text (the biblical tradition), context (socio-historical, religious, political and economic), and subtext (the philosophical, theological and cultural assumptions of our various contexts).

84 One of the main problems in evangelical circles has been the relative lack of interdisciplinary work being done by theologians, biblical specialists, ethicists, missiologists, church leaders, etc. in addressing this issue of boundaries. In the North American and British context a broad-based group of evangelical and mainline scholars and church leaders are engaged in reflection on the missional vocation of the church in the postmodern context, which deals with the topic of this inquiry. This cadre of leaders is known as the *Gospel and Culture Network*: http://www.gocn.org/. See selected books of those associated with this network: Hunsberger, George R., Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Chin, Shiba, George R. Hunsberger, Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, eds. *Christian Ethics in Ecumenical Context: Theology, Culture, and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Volf, Miroslav, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). For other authors who engage in this task from a similar perspective, incorporating all the elements we have advocated in this paper (text, context and subtext) and whose theologizing would be helpful to evangelicals in the task of defining their boundaries, see Jones, Serene, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity, 1995); Fowl, Stephen E. and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Spohn, William C., *What are they Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1995).

Conscience

Reproach yields no relief,
To a darker side that would not be so dark.
God within me, yet unknown
Protests misdeeds with gnawing discontent.
Disquiet hardens into cold remorse,
And regret becomes dull resignation,
Till ears bend keenly to Gospel word
Embracing the possibility of new birth.

by Garry Harris, South Australia (used with permission)