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# Whither Evangelical Theology? The Work of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen as a Case Study of Contemporary Trajectories

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**KEYWORDS:** *Ecumenical theology, Pentecostalism, Roman Catholic Church, Theology of Religion, Ecclesiology, tradition*

## Introduction

IT was the appearance of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's most recent book, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification*, which occasioned the invitation to review his larger corpus in the pages of this journal.<sup>1</sup> My long-stand-

ing appreciation for Kärkkäinen's theological work had previously been registered in my collecting, editing, and publishing a set of his essays in book form a few years ago (*TPT*). In the editor's introduction to that book, I noted that Kärkkäinen was fast becoming one of the more important theologians to be reckoned with in our time. He had not only already established himself as one of the leading Pentecostal voices in the academy, but has also been working hard toward an ecumenical rather than merely confessional theology. In the meanwhile, the Kärkkäinen volumes which have appeared in the past few years have not only confirmed but also added to his theological reputation.

As I reflect on Kärkkäinen's wide-ranging publications across the fields of ecumenical and systematic theology

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Kärkkäinen's books will be cited parenthetically; see the bibliography for a key to the abbreviations. My thanks to David Parker, editor of *ERT*, for the invitation, the opportunity, and the space for this extended engagement with Kärkkäinen's work.

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and more recently in theology of religions, I am led to ask important questions about the present and future directions of evangelical theology. There are actually two sides to this question, one concerning the status of Kärkkäinen as an evangelical theologian, and the other concerning the contested nature of evangelical theology itself. With regard to the former issue, I will shortly attempt to make the case for why Kärkkäinen qualifies as an evangelical theologian. The latter issue, of course, is complex. The boundaries of evangelicalism and, by extension, evangelical theology, have always been debated.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, some have suggested that evangelicals should focus not on boundary disputes but on identifying common and unifying core convictions.<sup>3</sup> However, attaining agreement on what elements are non-negotiable and what are adiaphora has proven elusive, especially since the diverse evangelicalism of the Euro-American west has been complexified with the recent growth of evangelical churches in the eastern

and southern hemispheres.<sup>4</sup> The present configuration of evangelicalism as a pluralistic and global phenomenon raises the question about what evangelical theology is or should be as we proceed into the twenty-first century.

In the following pages, I wish to take up this question about evangelical theology today, and do so by looking at the work of Kärkkäinen. I will argue that Kärkkäinen is an evangelical-ecumenical-world theologian in the making, and that it is, in fact, not only possible but even necessary that evangelical theology move in some of the directions charted out by him. The next three sections (II-IV) look at each of these three (evangelical, ecumenical, world) interrelated aspects of Kärkkäinen's theological work, followed by a critical dialogue with Kärkkäinen (V). I conclude in the briefer last section (VI) by asking about how Kärkkäinen's *oeuvre* to date also speaks to the possibilities and challenges regarding the future of evangelical theology in the twenty-first century.

## II—Kärkkäinen as Evangelical Theologian

Prosecution of the thesis that Kärkkäinen is an evangelical-ecumenical-world theologian needs to begin with a look at his evangelical credentials. Resistance to this could come from two directions. For one, Kärkkäinen has identified himself first and foremost as a 'Pentecostal theologian' (formerly) or 'ecumenical theologian' (more recently), and much less as an 'evangelical theologian'. For some evangelicals, the labels 'Pentecostal' and 'ecumenical' signify experientialism and

2 Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

3 E.g., Gabriel Fackre, *Restoring the Center: Essays Evangelical and Ecumenical* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), and Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

4 See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and John M. Hitchen, 'What It Means to Be an Evangelical Today—An Antipodean Perspective,' *Evangelical Quarterly*, part I, 76:1 (2004): 47-64, and part II, 76:2 (2004): 99-115.

enthusiasm on the one hand and liberalism and diminished evangelistic zeal on the other hand, and these traits are considered antithetical to authentic evangelical identity. At another level, for other more conservative evangelicals, Kärkkäinen's affiliation with Fuller Theological Seminary (since 2000) also puts him outside the evangelical orbit, given Fuller's historically more ecumenical and neo-evangelical reputation.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is his location at Fuller that would also lead most theologians in the academy to identify Kärkkäinen as an evangelical. This irony provides further justification for us to utilize the work of Kärkkäinen as a lens to explore the present state of evangelical theology and query about its future directions. I proceed to defend Kärkkäinen as an evangelical theologian along three lines: through a biographical summary of his personal and theological journey, an overview of the evangelical elements of his early theological work, and a survey of his more recent publishing record.

The second of four children, Veli-Matti was born in 1957 to Toivo and Aino Kärkkäinen who were then faithful in the Finnish Lutheran Church. During his teen years, he made a renewed commitment to the Christian faith even as the family was in the process of affiliating with a small Pentecostal congregation in his home town of Kiuruvesi. After receiving his masters in education from the University of Jyväskylä (in Jyväskylä, Finland) in 1982 and working for a few years as a

faculty secretary and lecturer at the same institution, Kärkkäinen moved with this wife, Anne-Päivi, and two daughters, Nelli and Maiju, to Pasadena, California, and enrolled in Fuller Theological Seminary's masters in theological studies program. While completing that degree (1988-1989), he pastored a small, independent evangelical church, the Finnish Christian Fellowship, in Los Angeles. Influenced by two prominent Pentecostal professors at Fuller, Dr. Cecil M. Robeck and Dr. Russell Spittler,<sup>6</sup> he took out a membership with the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 1988, and has remained an active member ever since.<sup>7</sup> Upon completing his work at Fuller, Kärkkäinen returned to Jyväskylä where he was ordained by the Full Gospel Church, a classical Pentecostal denomination in Finland, and pastored a Full Gospel Church congregation there from 1989-1991.

In June 1991, Kärkkäinen again moved with his family to Thailand to work as a Full Gospel missionary at the Full Gospel Bible College (FGBC) in Bangkok. At FGBC, Kärkkäinen

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5 George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

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6 TPT was dedicated jointly to Robeck and Killian McDonald. Kärkkäinen's indebtedness to Spittler was expressed in a *festschrift* essay: 'Theology of the Cross: A Stumbling Block to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality?' in Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, eds., *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Russell P. Spittler* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 150-63.

7 In 1994 and 1995, Kärkkäinen joined the European Pentecostal Theological Association and the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, respectively. He remains an active member in these scholarly organizations as well.

taught a wide range of courses and also served as the college's academic dean. During his tenure, he learned to speak, read, and write in Thai.<sup>8</sup> Upon completing his term assignment, the Kärkkäinens returned to Finland where Veli-Matti began serving at the Pentecostal Full Gospel Iso Kirja-College (in Keuruu), first as professor of theology, and then in 1994 as president. During this time, he matriculated at the University of Helsinki to pursue research in ecumenical theology and dogmatics. Kärkkäinen completed his doctorate in 1998—as a visiting scholar hosted and mentored by Kilian McDonnell and the Institute of Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota—with a dissertation on the first three quinquennia of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, and then wrote his *habilitationsschrift* in 1999 focused on the fourth quinquennium of the dialogue.

Both the dissertation and the *habilitationsschrift* have been published (SS and AT). In these volumes Kärkkäinen provides a summary account of the first four rounds of the dialogue between official delegates of the Roman Catholic Church and various Pentecostal scholars and theologians

who have been able to participate over the years.<sup>9</sup> Consisting of one week of meetings a year for five years, the dialogues over the first four years included: 1) an initial phase of mutual introduction (1972-1977); 2) many of the 'hard questions' between the two traditions, such as glossolalia, hermeneutics, healing, tradition and experience, Mary (1977-1982); 3) an exploration of various topics related to the church and the communion of saints (1985-1989); and 4) a discussion of evangelization and mission (1990-1996). Three brief comments about the methodological, thematic, and theological aspects of these volumes are important for our purposes.

First, the research and writing of *Spiritus ubi vult spirat* ('the Spirit blows where it wills') and *Ad ultimum terrae* ('to the ends of the earth') emerged out of Kärkkäinen's immersion into the theological traditions of both modern Pentecostalism and the Roman Catholic Church. To be sure, both volumes relied heavily on the Final Reports of the dialogue,<sup>10</sup> the theological position papers written specifically for the dialogue, and the formal

8 Kärkkäinen also has command of Finnish, his mother-tongue, Swedish, the second national language of Finland, and English and German, besides being able to read Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, and other Scandinavian languages, and having a working knowledge of the biblical and theological languages. He has published and continues to publish widely in Finnish and other Scandinavian languages, especially in popular and ecclesial periodical literature.

9 Given that most classical Pentecostal denominations have been suspicious of the ecumenical movement, none have formally recognized the dialogue. Pentecostal participants have not been formal representatives of their churches, and usually rely not on denominational sources of support but on either institutional or private funding.

10 The Final Reports of the first three quinquennia were published in *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:2 (1990): 85-142; the fourth appeared in *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 21:1 (1999): 3-88.

recorded dialogue notes. At the same time, because Kärkkäinen's goal was not just to present a descriptive account of the dialogue but also to provide theological analysis, he took up the task of mastering the growing amount of theological literature being produced by Pentecostal scholarship and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology. The latter not only formed the background for the Roman Catholic approach and contribution to dialogues but also allowed for, and in some instances, sustained the Catholic charismatic renewal movement. In the process, Kärkkäinen familiarized himself with the major Catholic theologians of the last two generations—Rahner, Congar, Schillebeeckx, Ratzinger, von Balthasar, Dulles, Mühlen, Sullivan, Gelpi, and others—which in turn introduced him to the breadth and depth of the Catholic theological tradition. We will see below (III) how this wide-ranging engagement with Catholic theology has served Kärkkäinen as an ecumenical theologian.

Second, Kärkkäinen's comprehensive overview of the first four quinquennia of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue meant that he had been given the opportunity to engage both with the broad scope of the theological spectrum and with the particularly problematic topics dividing the two theological traditions. Over the course of the two volumes, then, we observe the emergence of Kärkkäinen the systematic theologian precisely through his grappling with the challenging issues raised by the dialogue. What is the nature of revelation and of Scripture? What is the role of the tradition, of experience, and of the Holy Spirit in

biblical interpretation? What does Christian initiation consist of, and what role, if any, does Spirit- and water-baptism play in this experience or process? What is the nature of the church, and how do we understand the unity of the body of Christ, the apostolicity of the church, the ordination of its ministers, and the charismatic dimension of the church in relationship to the Kingdom of God? What does the missionary mandate of the church consist of, and how do we define the evangelistic thrust of the church in relationship to culture, social justice, proselytism, and common witness? Throughout, Kärkkäinen deftly negotiates the tension between accurately reporting on the dialogue on the one hand, while providing critical analysis and measured assessment on the other.

This leads, third, to the specifically theological tendencies we see emerging during this early phase of Kärkkäinen's work. While Kärkkäinen repeatedly demonstrates that he recognizes the value and truth of the Catholic perspective, he nevertheless inevitably suggests a way forward which strengthens rather than betrays a Pentecostal theological identity in particular and a theological orientation in line with confessing church (Free Church) commitments in general.<sup>11</sup> So, biblical

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<sup>11</sup> The confessing or Free Church tradition derives from the Anabaptist Reformation. For overviews, see Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), and Barry L. Callen, *Radical Christianity: The Believers Church Tradition in Christianity's History and Future* (Nappanee, In.: Evangel, 1999).

revelation is neither merely mediated by tradition nor merely propositional, but is personally encountered in and through Scripture (revelation's ultimate norm) by the power of the Holy Spirit; Spirit-baptism is limited neither to Christian initiation nor to post-conversion charismatic experiences, but may be suggestive of the fullness of Christian life marked by dynamic Christian witness; the church is neither merely a hierarchical institution nor merely a localized and organic body of believers, but a diverse communion (or fellowship, *koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit; and evangelization is neither exhausted by social concerns nor defined only in terms of personal transformation, but includes both within the wider *missio Dei* that seeks to reconcile the world to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. Of course, differences remain about apostolicity (apostolic succession versus apostolic experience made available today by the Spirit), Mary (*theotokos* versus servant of the Lord), tradition (the papacy and the magisterium versus the priesthood of all believers), conversion (life long process versus sudden experience), and other topics. Kärkkäinen would acknowledge these impasses, but routinely calls for further research.

These early volumes reflect the emergence of Kärkkäinen as an evangelical theologian. They demonstrate the possibility of engaging ecumenical dialogue in ways that compromise neither confessing church commitments in general nor Pentecostal identity in particular. On the contrary, it is precisely in dialogue that one's theological position is deepened even while, paradoxically, a confessionally

grounded and yet ecumenically generous understanding of the gospel is forged. Not surprisingly, it was also during this period of research and writing that Kärkkäinen was invited to participate in other evangelical networks: the Lausanne Committee of Finland (1994-present), the AD2000 Committee of Finland (1994-present), the International Consultation on World Evangelization (held in Seoul, Korea, in May 1995), and the International Charismatic Consultation on World Evangelization (1998-present), just to name a few. Arguably, his work on these committees and consultations provided concrete opportunities to test out ideas forged in the theological laboratory. These early publications and ecumenical work vaulted Kärkkäinen to the forefront of Pentecostal theology in dialogue with the broader church and academy. It was partly on these merits that Kärkkäinen was invited to join the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary in the fall of 2000.

Since joining the Fuller faculty, Kärkkäinen has increasingly solidified his evangelical theological reputation. This is reflected, in part, in a torrid pace of writing that has resulted in seven other volumes, including a three-part systematics textbook on pneumatology, Christology, and the doctrine of God. Throughout, Kärkkäinen has defined an evangelical theology as one that 'cherish[es] classical Christianity as explicated in the creeds and mainstream confessions' (*C*, 171; cf. *OG*, 81 and *ITR*, 145), and defended 'the more orthodox version of Christianity as opposed to the liberal left wing' (*DG*, 192). Scripture is understood as the infallible touchstone for theological reflection and as the 'normative source

of theology and practice' (*ITR*, 33; cf. *TPT*, 26-28), and five out of the six theology textbooks (the soteriology, three-volumed theology, and theology of religions) begin with biblical overviews. Further, as we shall soon see, Kärkkäinen's early exploration on pneumatological theology in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue has combined with his commitments to a high Christology to produce a robust trinitarian framework for theological reflection. Finally, the missionary and evangelistic zeal characteristic of Kärkkäinen's Pentecostal roots have not diminished, but rather found new and intensified expression in his engagement with the topic of theology of religions (see §IV).

As a result of these developments during his tenure at Fuller, Kärkkäinen has become somewhat of a spokesperson for the evangelical perspective in theology. His invitation to contribute to volumes focused on bringing evangelical theology into dialogue with the wider academy reflects a growing appreciation for his evangelical com-

mitments.<sup>12</sup> A new editorial project launched with his colleague, William Dyrness, and tentatively titled *Global Dictionary of Theology* (under contract with InterVarsity Press), promises to unveil the richness of the evangelical theological landscape as it has developed around the world. To be sure, more conservative evangelicals and certainly most fundamentalists will continue to question Kärkkäinen's evangelical credentials. However, given any moderate (rather than conservative) definition of evangelical, Kärkkäinen's status as an evangelical theologian is difficult to deny.

### III—Kärkkäinen as Ecumenical Theologian

Kärkkäinen's ecumenical journey has continued over the years. He has been involved in the International Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Pentecostals (1996-present), served as a consultant to and member of Faith and Order (Finland, 1994-2001; and USA and Canada, 2001), and participated in consultations and committees of the World Council of Churches ('Toward Common Witness,' 1996; Joint Working Group between the WCC and Pentecostals, 1999-present; 'Ecclesiology and Mission' Consultation, 1999-present; Theological Preparatory Consultation on Mission, 2000-present; Advisory Group for Church and Ecumenical Relations, 2000-present; and Consultation on Healing and Faith, 2002-present). All of this work has confirmed the global horizons for Christian theological reflection nurtured during his formative experiences teaching in Asia

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12 E.g., Kärkkäinen, 'The Uniqueness of Christ and Trinitarian Faith', in Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Christ the One and Only: A Global Affirmation of the Uniqueness of Jesus Christ* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, and Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); 'Christianity and Other Religions', in Sung Wook Chung, ed., *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, and Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005); 'Evangelical Theology and Religions', in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and 'Wolfhart Pannenberg', in Steve Carter, ed., *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).



and studying and pastoring in Europe and North America. I suggest that the best way of understanding Kärkkäinen as an ecumenical theologian is precisely by grasping the worldwide scope of his theological vision. Presentation of this global sensitivity is most efficiently accomplished in a brief overview of the methodology and content of Kärkkäinen's trinitarian trilogy, ecclesiology, and soteriology.

I begin with *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (2002) in part because the ecumenical scope of Kärkkäinen's work is here most clearly evidenced. There are three parts to the book. 'Ecclesiological Traditions' includes discussions of the doctrine of the Church in Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, the Reformed churches, the Free churches, the Pentecostal/charismatic orbit, and the ecumenical movement. 'Leading Contemporary Ecclesialogists' include John Zizioulas' 'communion ecclesiology' (Orthodox), Hans Küng's 'charismatic ecclesiology' (Roman Catholic), Wolfhart Pannenberg's 'universal ecclesiology' (Lutheran), Jürgen Moltmann's 'messianic ecclesiology' (Reformed), Miroslav Volf's 'participatory ecclesiology' (Free Church and Pentecostal), James McClendon, Jr.'s 'baptist ecclesiology' (Anabaptist), and Lesslie Newbigin's 'missionary ecclesiology' (evangelical Anglican).

The last part, 'Contextual Ecclesiologies', overviews the Non-Church movement of Kanzo Uchimura in Japan, the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, the feminist church (as represented by Letty Russell and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza), the African Independent (indigenous) Churches, the Shepherding movement (in Pente-

costal/charismatic circles), the new 'world church' (in dialogue with Catholic moral and political theologian, Oliver O'Donovan), and the post-Christian Church as 'another city' (in dialogue primarily with Barry Harvey, but in the tradition of prominent theologians like Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder). Already the heavily ecumenical flavour of the ecclesiology is unmistakable.

While much could be said about Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology, its ecumenical potential, I suggest, is partly the result of the specifically pneumatological thread that is woven throughout the volume. Eastern Orthodoxy is not only 'Spirit-sensitive', but also understands the church to be constituted by the Spirit. Post-Vatican II Catholic ecclesiology has emphasized the importance of the charisms in the life of the church (thus opening the door to the charismatic renewal in the church, for sure). Lutheran ecclesiology understands the Spirit to make alive both the Word and the sacraments. Obviously, Pentecostal/charismatic ecclesiologies emphasize the church as a 'charismatic fellowship'.

Turning to contemporary ecclesialogists, we see a similar recurrence of pneumatic and charismatic motifs. Zizioulas emphasizes Christology and pneumatology as the dual foundations of the church. Küng writes about the church as the 'creation of the Spirit'. Pannenberg's is a thoroughly pneumatological ecclesiology, an understanding of the church permeated by the person and work of the Spirit. Moltmann wrote a very influential book titled *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (ET: SCM Press, 1977). Volf focuses on the charismatic and trinitarian structure of

the church. McClendon's 'baptist vision' is very similar to those of Pentecostals, emphasizing the 'this is that' correlation between the present experience of the Spirit and the experiences of the earliest Christians as recorded in the book of Acts. And, of course, how can one have a missionary ecclesiology such as Newbigin's without a robust pneumatology? Thus we have Newbigin's portrait of the church as a 'community of the Holy Spirit.' Pneumatic and charismatic themes are evident also in the contextual ecclesiologies, not only in the African 'Spirit-churches', but also in the Shepherding Movement's 'renewal ecclesiology'.

In short, Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology is not just an introductory textbook, although it is that as well. Rather, it can also be read as providing a constructive and ecumenical ecclesiology precisely through the development of a pneumatological theology of the church. The ecumenical nature of the church is established, in this case, not politically, organizationally, or structurally, but theologically (read: pneumatologically). To draw from the biblical metaphor of the gift of the Spirit, the many tongues of Pentecost prefigure the church as a unity constituted by diversity, and, hence, ecclesiology as constituted by the many gifts of the many churches and the many perspectives of her theologians.

Not surprisingly, then, Kärkkäinen's three-volume trinitarian theology begins with the *Pneumatology* (2002). The six chapters introduce the topic, provide a wide range of biblical material, look at developments in the Christian theological tradition, present ecclesiastical perspectives (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran,

Pentecostal/charismatic, and ecumenical), highlight leading contemporary theologians of the Spirit (the Orthodox Zizioulas, the Catholic Rahner, the Lutheran Pannenberg, the Reformed Moltmann, the biblical pneumatology of Michael Welker, and the evangelical Clark Pinnock), and conclude with what Kärkkäinen called 'contextual' pneumatologies (drawn from recent developments in process theology, liberation theology, ecological theology, feminist theology, and African theology). It is obvious that in a relatively short volume, Kärkkäinen is simply providing a survey of the theological landscape, precisely the task of an introductory theological text.

The approach in *Pneumatology* provides various windows into Kärkkäinen's theological method. First, Kärkkäinen is attuned to the perspectivalism of all theological reflection. This pluralism is not, however, a threat to the theological enterprise. Rather, theology is enriched precisely by the diversity of perspectives. This begins especially with the scriptural data, and is continued in the historical and ecclesiastical traditions. Second, drawing in part from his missionary background, Kärkkäinen recognizes that contemporary theological reflection needs to engage the wide range of perspectives outside the theological mainstream of the Euro-American West. Hence the liberation perspectives of Latin American theologians and the spirit-world perspectives of African theologians need to be given voice. Finally, the entire tenor of Kärkkäinen's initial contribution to a trinitarian theology is dialogical rather than polemical. In contrast to traditional evangelical theologies which either ignore or casti-

gate process, 'green,' or feminist perspectives, Kärkkäinen's attitude is respectful, reflecting a willingness to learn.

Those looking for explicit critical comment will be disappointed. However, those willing to read between the lines will observe that Kärkkäinen has adopted in this volume the posture previously developed in his work on the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue: that discovery of critical points of difference both requires honest acknowledgment and calls for further research. This approach invigorates theology as a personal and communal journey in the Spirit: 'New discoveries, new challenges, new potentialities await' (P, 177).

A similar method and ethos pervades the *Christology* (2003). Part I presents the 'many faces of Christ' in the Bible, while part II surveys the history of Christology from the post-apostolic period through the early councils and medieval developments to the various quests for the historical Jesus initiated during the modern period. Parts III and IV overview contemporary western and non-western (again, Kärkkäinen calls these 'contextual') christologies. The former include short chapters on Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Zizioulas, Rahner, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Norman Kraus (of the Disciples of Christ tradition), Stanley Grenz, and John Hick.

The latter present an even wider kaleidoscope of christological ideas: process theology as represented in the work of John B. Cobb, Jr., among others; various feminist perspectives; black theology as exemplified in James Cone and the South African theologian, Allan Boesak; postmodernists like

Mark Taylor and Ted Peters (who Kärkkäinen suggests represents an 'evangelical version of postmodern Christology'); Latin American liberation theology as seen in Gutierrez, Boff, Gonzalez, and Sobrino; African theology as articulated by John Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti, Aylward Shorter, and Benezet Bujo; and Asian theology as proposed by Raimundo Panikkar, Stanley Samartha, Korean Minjung theologians, and Indian Dalit thinkers. As Kärkkäinen's colleague at Fuller, Colin Brown, notes, the *Christology* is 'breathtaking in scope and pace' (back cover).

Three brief comments about Kärkkäinen's *Christology* are in order. First, while Kärkkäinen is focused on the second article of the creed, his wide range of dialogue partners brings with them issues that touch on the entirety of the theological spectrum. Process thinkers have metaphysical concerns, John Hick, and others, engage in christological reflection in light of the challenges of religious pluralism, Bultmannians and Tillichians (among others) are divided over the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, etc. Here, the systematic thinking cultivated in his earlier work allows Kärkkäinen to present the issues clearly without losing a sense of (christological) coherence.

Second, Kärkkäinen's introductory comment is also illuminating: 'the most exciting feature of the current scene is the rise of contextual and/or intercultural Christologies that attempt to speak to specific local needs...or needs of specific groups of people (such as women or the poor)' (C, 10-11). Rather than seeing this as a capitulating to a postmodern rela-

tivistic hermeneutic, I suggest that this represents actually the full flowering of an evangelical and Pentecostal commitment to understanding the gospel as transculturally relevant. In this, the motivation is not merely to develop an apologetic against liberalism or any other kind of -ism, but to engage the beliefs and practices of the worldwide church.

This leads, finally, to Kärkkäinen's concluding suggestions for future research, which are themselves instructive: further explication of Christology in a religiously plural world; further extension and assessment of the various contextual christologies; further inquiry into the relationship between the person and work of Christ, the latter with regard to engaging the various contexts of christological reflection; and further reflection on the connection of Christology to pneumatology and the larger trinitarian question regarding the identity of the Christian God. As with the pneumatology, Kärkkäinen's Christology is published but still very much in via media—there is always more that can and should be said.

Not surprisingly, given the many promissory notes handed on by the *Pneumatology* and *Christology*, Kärkkäinen's *The Doctrine of God* (2004) is the most ambitious and lengthy of the three, focused as it is not only on God the Father, but also on the trinitarian identity of God. As before, however, the goal of *The Doctrine of God* as the culminating volume of the trilogy is to bring the classical theistic tradition into dialogue with its modern/recent challengers.

Again, parts I and II focus on the biblical and historical traditions as

internally pluralistic and thematically diverse, yet with a narrational coherence. Parts III and IV elaborate on familiar contemporary European theologians, and on North American theologies in dialogue with the classical tradition (secular/Death-of-God theology, process theology, open theism, and evangelical theology). Parts V and VI explore other more 'contextual' North American options (native American theologies, African American and immigrant theologies, and feminist, womanist, and Latina theologies), and God in 'non-western perspective' (African, Latin American, and Asian theologies). Again, Kärkkäinen is generally sympathetic in his discussion of the thirty plus theologians he describes, even if generalizations are unavoidable, given his attempt to cover as much theological ground as he does in a limited amount of space.

Yet there are also subtle but significant shifts to be observed in *The Doctrine of God*. Here, Kärkkäinen offers more of his own critical perspective, even if such is often disguised as mere commentary. So, while Tillich's theology was highly contextualized to the existentialist ethos of the mid-twentieth century, 'after roughly two decades of unprecedented interest, it did not redeem its promises for continuing movement' (*DG*, 166).<sup>13</sup> Further, the Death-of-God theology—in its more radical form expounded by William Hamilton and Thomas J. J. Altizer—'could not sustain itself. It was criticized not only by churchgoers and the

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13 Contra Kärkkäinen, however, Tillich scholarship is certainly alive and well in the theological academy.

general public for introducing atheism and paganism into the Christian faith but also by serious theological critics such as Langdon Gilkey for taking the term *God* out of the sphere of Christian theology and Christian tradition' (DG, 178).<sup>14</sup> Last (for our purposes) but not least (given space constraints), it is asked if process theology 'has been too contextual in succumbing to the framework of a panentheistic worldview' (DG, 185).<sup>15</sup>

*The Doctrine of God* concludes also with suggestions for future research along three lines. First, Kärkkäinen calls for further work on postmodern reactions to the Enlightenment. The limits of western modernism have to be recognized. What comes after modernity, however, is still an open question. Second, the expansion of Christianity in the southern and eastern hemispheres demands theological recon-

struction as well. Such work should be dialogical, involving the world church, even if southern and eastern voices are to be privileged initially. The 'exciting developments' in trinitarian theological speculation occurring in these contexts are what fuels, in part, Kärkkäinen's optimism about the future prospects of theology. Finally, the new situation of religious pluralism needs to be grappled with theologically. A greater sensitivity to the issues raised by the diversity of religions can be noted in the *Christology* and even more so in *The Doctrine of God*.

In looking back over the trinitarian trilogy, certain features of Kärkkäinen's theological method highlight its distinctively ecumenical flavour, including its taking seriously Roman Catholic and Orthodox perspectives. As important is the breadth of positions given space and voice in these three textbooks. While one may wonder about why only newer eastern and southern perspectives are labelled as 'contextual', nevertheless Kärkkäinen is to be applauded for taking seriously the emerging 'non-western' voices in the theological conversation. Methodologically, Kärkkäinen is sensitive to the different socio-historical and cultural-religious contexts within which the task of theology is pursued, and hence more open to narrative approaches to the theological task. Theologically, the doctrines of the Spirit, of Christ, and of God are dynamic and 'tangible', being located within particular traditions of discourse and communities of practices. Ethically, Kärkkäinen realizes that the theological reflection has implications for socio-political liberation and for interreligious relationships, among

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14 Again, however, Altizer's theological articulations continue to command attention in the theological academy. For a recent restatement of his position, see T. J. J. Altizer, 'The Primordial, Godhead, and Apocalyptic Christianity', in Amos Yong and Peter G. Heltzel, eds., *Theology in Global Context: Essays in Honor of Robert Cummings Neville* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 265-76; for an assessment of Altizer's recent Christology in comparison with other christologies, see Amos Yong, 'Globalizing Christology: Anglo-American Perspectives in World Religious Context', *Religious Studies Review*, forthcoming.

15 Interestingly, Kärkkäinen's most critical comments seem directed toward positions commonly classified under the category of theological liberalism, much of which is in its second, third, or even fourth generation. These critical remarks are less noticeable in his discussion of non-western theologies.

other concrete realities.

In contrast to the ecclesiology and the trinitarian trilogy, Kärkkäinen's soteriology, *One with God* (2004), is less a textbook than it is a constructive theological monograph. Kärkkäinen's objective is to develop a doctrine of salvation that bridges not only East and West, but also Catholic and Lutheran emphases in the western church, and toward that end, he suggests that the fusion of the Orthodox doctrine of deification and the Lutheran doctrine of justification can be accomplished through the motif 'union with God'. Distinguishing Luther's own theology of salvation from that of the later Lutheran confessions with the help of the recent Finnish Mannermaa School of Luther research,<sup>16</sup> Kärkkäinen suggests that biblical perspectives on salvation read through the early Luther should be understood not only in terms of forensic justification but also in terms of ontological transformation, not just in terms of a spiritual transaction between God and Christ, but also in terms of human participation in the very life of God.

Defence of this thesis proceeds through an exposition of the idea of justification in recent New Testament scholarship, an elaboration of deification in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, an explication of justification and deification in Luther's theology and later Protestantism (Anabaptism, Method-

ism, and evangelical theology), and an overview of recent ecumenical conversations on the doctrine of salvation (Lutheran-Orthodox, Roman Catholic-Lutheran, and Orthodox-Pentecostal).

In the final chapter, Kärkkäinen presents a kaleidoscope of supporting perspectives on his soteriological hypothesis. Is not 'union' one of, if not the only, defining motif of eastern and western soteriologies? Does not 'union' allow for the retrieval of fresh biblical imagery and voices? In what ways does the 'union' motif connect justification with sanctification, and recover emphasis on the doctrine of love for the doctrine of salvation? As he weaves his way through these discussions, a substantive pneumatological and trinitarian theology of salvation emerges, recapturing and extending his earlier work in these theological loci. Kärkkäinen concludes by asking about what justification and salvation mean in the wider world context of the third millennium, and how to understand the theological and dialogical implications of deification, justification, and union with God in the Christian encounter with other faiths.

Before we take up in details aspects of this last question in the next section, it would be helpful to provide some summary remarks on Kärkkäinen as an ecumenical theologian. What is most valuable about Kärkkäinen's introductory surveys is their global awareness, a feature practically absent from most evangelical treat-

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<sup>16</sup> Tuomo Mannermaa is a Finnish Lutheran theologian who has led this re-reading of Luther's theology; Kärkkäinen cites Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), as a good introduction to the Mannermaa School.

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<sup>17</sup> An exception is Aida Besancon Spencer and William David Spencer, eds., *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

ments of these same topics.<sup>17</sup> I gather that this global sensitivity has developed in part not only because of Kärkkäinen's living, working and studying on three continents, but in part also because the Pentecostalism which nurtures his faith, spirituality and piety is now truly a worldwide movement. Thinking theologically as a Pentecostal (in particular) and as a Christian (in general) today requires just this kind of global vision in order that justice can even begin to be done to the topics under consideration. But perhaps more importantly, Kärkkäinen is committed not to any parochial theology, but to the development of Christian theology in its full ecumenical breadth and depth. To be sure, the Pentecostal perspectives informing Kärkkäinen's early work remain with him (as seen in the inclusion of the Pentecostal voice in *One with God*), but the church does not need another theology, Pentecostal or otherwise. Rather, what is needed is a trinitarian theology that is informed by the biblical traditions and by the many Christian perspectives down through the ages and, now, across the world—in short, a 'consensual' and ecumenical theology.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV—Kärkkäinen as World Theologian

The development of Kärkkäinen as world theologian derives, in large part,

from the work of Kärkkäinen the missiologist. Recall not only his missionary work in Thailand but also that his *habilitationschrift* was a missiology as seen through the Roman-Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue. Since then, Kärkkäinen has taken out membership in the International Association of Mission Studies (2002-present) and the American Missiological Society (2001-present), and continued publishing on theology of mission in various scholarly periodicals, among other forums.<sup>19</sup> Out of this concern for understanding Christian mission, and confronted with the religiously plural context of such mission in the twenty-first century, Kärkkäinen had already begun to take up in the trinitarian trilogy some of the theological questions regarding Christian identity in a religiously plural world and the Christian encounter with other faiths. The *Christology* discussed John Hick's universalist view of Christ, and questions concerning religious pluralism were dealt with across the entirety of *The Doctrine of God*.

In *One with God*, Kärkkäinen queries the theological potential of the 'union with God' motif for interreligious dialogue (*OG*, 133-37). Does such an understanding of salvation provide a bridge for dialogue with traditional African notions of 'vital participation' (or other ideas from the world religions)? Yet Kärkkäinen cautions

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18 Kärkkäinen, 'David's Sling: The Promise and the Problem of Pentecostal Theology Today—A Response to D. Lyle Dabney', *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 23:1 (2001): 147-52, esp. 152.

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19 Kärkkäinen's missiological essays have appeared in such as the *International Review of Mission*, *Missiology*, *Asian Journal of Mission*, *Mission Studies*, *Missionalia*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, and *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*.

against a naïve optimism regarding assuming too many commonalities between religious traditions since surface conceptual similarities often reveal radical differences when the deep structure of the traditions are examined. It is precisely because of these differences, however, that 'the common search of humanity to find union with God may teach Christians valuable lessons' (OG, 136). In the process, Christians who are made one with God in Christ can manifest to their neighbours in other faiths not only the love of Christ but also, following Luther, even Christ himself.<sup>20</sup> But are there limits to what Christians can learn from those in other faiths? Is there anything genuinely new that can be received from the interreligious encounter that is not already contained within the Christian faith?

It is in part these questions that motivated Kärkkäinen's *Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (2003) and *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* (2004). The former is an introductory text while the latter is more an initial attempt to articulate a constructive Christian theology of religions. The breadth of the *Introduction* is also wide-ranging. Part I presents the 'ambiguity and promise' of the various biblical per-

spectives on the religions, including the tension between the universalism and the particularism of the gospel message, while part II follows historical developments from the early church through the consolidation of the 'outside the church no salvation' position to the challenges brought by the Enlightenment and our contemporary experience of religious diversity. Part III provides unique perspectives from ecumenical documents revealing how different church traditions have attempted to wrestle with the issues, while part IV presents brief introductions to twenty-one different mostly contemporary theologians of the religions.

For this discussion, Kärkkäinen presents a new typology of theologies of religions: ecclesiocentrism, which limits salvation to Christian faith and emphasizes the importance of missionary proclamation in the encounter with religious others; christocentrism, which has Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical manifestations, and emphasizes salvation as through Christ, even if God may be at work through Christ (anonymously) by the Spirit in the lives of those in other faiths; and theocentrism, which deemphasizes the normativeness and absoluteness of Christ for those in other religious traditions.

As with the other introductory textbooks he has written, Kärkkäinen stays primarily with descriptive exposition and rarely ventures to provide critical commentary in this volume. He does note that John Hick's pluralistic theology of religions, which has generated widespread criticism, ultimately denies the absolutistic and particular truth claims of all the religions, an

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<sup>20</sup> See the section in the chapter on Luther titled, 'The Christian as 'Christ' to the Neighbor' (OG, 58-61). I wonder, in light of the parables of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46) and the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), whether or not Christians also encounter Christ in their neighbours of other faiths; for explication of this point, see Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), §6.1.2.



irony which ‘works against the pluralistic idea’ (*ITR*, 293). But Kärkkäinen does not raise a counter-question to Stanley Samartha’s similarly pluralistic claim—that with regard to Buddha, Krishna, Rama, and Christ, ‘the theory of multiple *avatara* (Hindu, ‘incarnated gods or other significant persons’) seems to be theologically the most accommodating attitude in a pluralistic setting, one that permits recognition of both the mystery of God and the freedom of people to respond to divine initiatives in different ways at different times’ (*ITR*, 301). The *Introduction* does include a concluding chapter of ‘critical reflections and questions’ which queries both the effectiveness of the typology and engages in a critical dialogue with the twenty-one theologians of religions. Here, the questions Kärkkäinen poses to Samartha are meta-theological (on the notions of truth and mystery, for example) rather than explicitly theological.

Again, as with his other introductory volumes, Kärkkäinen’s tone is conciliatory, and his posture continues to manifest the willingness to learn from his interlocutors, even those who do not adhere to the positions he espouses. The epilogue presents the future tasks for Christian theology of religions: the need for a constructive trinitarian theology of religions; the need for an empirical engagement with the religions as they exist in reality; and the need for common theological projects emergent from extended and sustained interreligious dialogue between representatives of the various faith traditions.

It is to these tasks that Kärkkäinen turns in *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*. In this volume, he focuses on nine the-

ologians (Barth, Rahner, Dupuis, D’Costa, Pannenberg, Pinnock, Hick, Panikkar, and S. Mark Heim, the only one not discussed in the *Introduction*), and provides a case study of the Roman Catholic Church’s engagement with Muslims in France. Kärkkäinen’s own theological voice sounds forth much more clearly as he engages in an ongoing critical conversation with his dialogue partners, both with regard to biblical interpretation and theological formulation. At one level, this volume represents the culmination of Kärkkäinen’s work to date insofar as it brings together his systematic orientation, his trinitarian theological commitments, and his previous work in theology of mission and theology of religions. At another level, however, this book signals the transition of Kärkkäinen as ecumenical theologian to Kärkkäinen as constructive theologian in a world religious context.

This development is most clearly seen in the concluding chapter where a catalog of where we have come from and where we should be headed is presented. In these pages, trinitarian theology is contrasted with the ‘normative’ pluralism (of Hick and others) insofar as the former provides a basic principle for a theology of religions that preserves the particularity of Christian claims about the Triune God. Further, a trinitarian theology of religions must not separate Christ from Spirit, nor Spirit from the Triune God, nor the church from the Kingdom; there also has to be continuity between the eschatological verification of the truth (here, Kärkkäinen relies on Pannenberg’s principle of eschatological verification) and the provisional theological hypotheses that are being

tested. Finally, a trinitarian theology of religions provides an ontological foundation for the one and the many, for communion amidst difference, with the proviso that it affirms only with difficulty Heim's proposal of multiple religious ends.<sup>21</sup>

Kärkkäinen reaffirms his evangelical commitments at the end of *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*:

Christian trinitarian faith, in my understanding, seeks to find outside the human person the grounds for preferring one narrative over another, that is, in the biblical salvation-history which narrates the history of the triune God in sending the Son in the power of the Spirit to save the world and bring it into an eternal communion. If that is foundationalism, so be it (TRP, 183n5).

By this, the traditional Christian principle of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) is acknowledged to be the starting point for Christian theological reflection, even with regard to the diversity of religions. At the same time, Kärkkäinen also insists (rightly, in my estimation) on a scripturally grounded universalism, described by John the Revelator's 'vision of God's people gathered together under one God' (TRP, 177).<sup>22</sup>

But aside from this methodological principle and soteriological affirmation, what exactly does Kärkkäinen

believe about the religions? With D'Costa (and Barth), but against Hick and Panikkar (and Rahner and Dupuis, depending on how they are interpreted), Kärkkäinen urges that 'other religions are not salvific as such, but other religions are important for the Christian church in that they help the church to penetrate more deeply into the divine mystery' (TRP, 179).

The question then becomes: what does it mean to 'penetrate more deeply into the divine mystery'? It appears that it is Christians who gain access to the depths of God precisely through their encounter with other faiths. But if such deeper understanding is not salvific, then what is it? If, according to *One with God*, salvation is participation and union with God, does the interreligious dialogue contribute to such personal and communal transformation? If it does, as the rhetoric of Kärkkäinen seems to imply, then are not other faiths also in some ways conduits of God's gracious and revelatory salvation?

I will return to this matter below. Meanwhile it is important to recognize that while Kärkkäinen does not shrink back from the speculative aspects of Christian theology of religions, his motivation from the beginning has been more missiological and concerned with Christian self-understanding. In other words, Christian reflection on the religions enables a more self-critical promulgation of the Christian mission and encourages a more dialogical approach to other faiths even as it helps Christians to understand themselves and the diversity of religions within the providential plan of God as enacted in history. In the process of grappling with these matters, Kärkkäi-

<sup>21</sup> As developed in S. Mark Heim, *The Depths of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> See also TRP, 146, where this eschatological vision is reiterated against Heim's proposal of multiple religious ends.

nen has come to recognize that religious diversity poses challenging questions to Christian theology today. Inevitably, by taking up these questions Kärkkäinen the evangelical and ecumenical theologian has become Kärkkäinen the world theologian and theologian of the world religions.

## V—Critical Questions for Kärkkäinen

I have two sets of critical questions for Kärkkäinen, one concerning his work as an ecumenical theologian and the other concerning his work as a theologian of the religions. We will take these in order before returning in the last section to the questions relating Kärkkäinen the evangelical theologian to the present and future of evangelical theology.

My first set of questions to Kärkkäinen concerns the overall methodology which underlies his ecumenical theology. In brief, this set of questions can be explicated in terms of three other interrelated questions: 1) Is not all theology contextual? 2) Is not the contextual character of any theology informed, at least in part, both by the questions that it grapples with and by the practices that give it shape? 3) In what ways is Kärkkäinen's own ecumenical theology in this sense contextual, and how can it best proceed as both contextual and ecumenical at the same time? Let me elaborate briefly on each of these questions in order.

First, the question regarding the contextual character of all theology emerges in large part out of Kärkkäinen's own theological categorization. Each volume of the trinitarian trilogy

has a 'contextual' section which refers to recently emergent non-western theologies that 'correct and complement the mainly Western approach that has dominated' (P, 147). In *Christology* and *The Doctrine of God*, Kärkkäinen acknowledges that this does not mean western theologies are not similarly contextual since no theology is 'immune to surrounding philosophical, religious, social, and political influences' (C, 188); yet the designation 'contextual' remains useful and relevant to the extent to which any theology is 'firmly anchored in a specific context, be it cultural, intellectual, or related to a specific worldview' (C, 188), and to the extent to which 'theologians *acknowledge* theologies to be contextually shaped' (DG, 199; emphasis original).

Any theologian has the prerogative to define his own terms. But what is it that contextualizes any theology? This is a complex question to which no simple answer will suffice. For our purposes, I suggest that a theology is contextually shaped by two interrelated factors: its historical practices and its socio-cultural situatedness. By this, I mean that any theology attempts to provide a coherent explanation that makes sense of its practices within the broader social, cultural, religious, and intellectual world. After Tillich, who urged that theology arises in the response of revelation to the questions of the situation, there should be no confusion that what I am calling 'socio-cultural situatedness' refers precisely to the contemporary world in all its complexity. But the other half of my claim regarding the contextuality of all theology requires further explication.

Following the work of Reinhard

Hütter and others, I suggest that theology (Christian belief) is (or should be) shaped as much by the practices of the church as by Scripture or tradition.<sup>23</sup> This is not to deny that Scripture and tradition have played and continue to play important roles in theological reflection. Rather, it is to say that Scripture and tradition are themselves constituted by the practices of the church, among other things. And what are these ecclesial practices? These would be the congregational liturgies (both structured and unstructured), the devotional life, the symbolic enactments, the economic habits, the political stances, the institutional interactivities, the social organizations and networks, and other concrete manifestations of Christian communities and the individuals that inhabit them.

From this perspective, for example, the Christian claim about Jesus Christ as Lord and as God (and, by extension, claims regarding trinitarian faith) is intricately tied up with the church's adoration and worship of Jesus; or the Christian understanding of the Eucharist is inextricably connected with the realization of the presence of Jesus around the communal table; or the Christian doctrine of the church is deeply intertwined with the inter-relationship between the church's political identity and its social practices; or the Christian doctrine of salvation is dependent on which of the biblical

metaphors resonate most deeply with the experiences and practices of the church in the various socio-historical contexts within which it exists, etc. (e.g., *OG*, 131-33). Again, this is not to deny that the Bible is normative and authoritative for shaping Christian practice, but it is to say that the relationship between scripture and practice is much more complicated than any one-way articulation of such relationship.

For our purposes, the preceding remarks raise the following methodological question about Kärkkäinen's ecumenical theology: insofar as all theology is contextual and thereby informed by the practices of the church (considered both diachronically across the centuries and synchronically around the world today), can Kärkkäinen's ecumenical theology succeed without taking into account the diversity of practices which inform the plurality of voices and perspectives that he has attempted so valiantly to preserve? Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology gives us windows into how the practices of the church contribute to constituting the ecclesiological traditions. But the books published after the ecclesiology are not as helpful in identifying how ecclesial practices shape and inform the teachings of the church(es) and her theologians.

In the Introduction to *Theology of Religions*, Kärkkäinen does draw from 'official church documents and confessional pronouncements' (*ITR*, 110), but he does not say much about how the liturgical practices of the Latin Church undergird its 'no salvation outside the church' stance; or how the sectarian practices of the Free Churches have shaped their more exclusivistic

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23 See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); cf. also Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

perspectives; or how the socio-political practices of the mainline Protestant denominations have similarly shaped the more inclusive attitudes of the ecumenical movement, etc. Granted, Kärkkäinen's intention was to write introductory textbooks about the church's beliefs, not social histories about the church's practices, so we should not be too hard on him for not doing what he never set out to accomplish.<sup>24</sup>

But the question remains: how viable is an ecumenical theology abstracted from the practices that sustain the beliefs and confessions of the church in all her diversity? In fact, let me put the matter even more strongly: an ecumenical theology is possible only in abstraction; often what continues to divide churches are the practices that inform the diversity of theologies at the ecumenical roundtable. This was seen in the processes leading up to and following the release and discussion of the ecumenical document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*,<sup>25</sup> and

remains especially problematic when the very different practices of churches in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere are factored into the ecumenical conversation. At the end of the day, how is an ecumenical theology even possible, given the radical differences that characterize the practices of the churches around the world?

Here is where I wish to present Kärkkäinen with a suggestion. Rather than attempting to develop an ecumenical theology in the abstract, why not acknowledge that there is no ahistorical ecumenical theology possible, and to work toward an ecumenical theology in confessional perspective? What about acknowledging that theological consensus cannot be achieved through abstract reflection alone, but that a truly ecumenical theology must be informed not only by the diversity of perspectives but also by a diversity of practices? If the 'tongues of Pentecost' reflect an ecumenical harmony of different voices declaring the wonders of God (Acts 2:11b),<sup>26</sup> then so also will the diversity of confessions reflect an ecumenical theology of different perspectives into the truth of God.

In this case, Kärkkäinen's own Pentecostal *habitus* does not inhibit the ecumenical potential of his theological vision. On the contrary, precisely because his Pentecostal perspective is rooted in the practices of his churches, the Pentecostal contribution is essential rather than marginal to the devel-

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24 Yet at one point in his discussion of Pannenberg's theology of religions, Kärkkäinen wonders if the result is a viewpoint that is 'one-sidedly rational' (TRP, 93). His question is motivated by what he takes to be the absence of doxology in Pannenberg's quest for truth in the interreligious arena. As such, Kärkkäinen seems to recognize the inseparability of the church's practices from her beliefs.

25 See *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), and, for commentary, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Initial Reactions from Roman Catholic Dioceses in the United States* (N.p.: National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers, 1986).

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26 I argue this point at length in my "As the Spirit Gives Utterance...": Pentecost, Intra-Christian Ecumenism, and the Wider *Oekumene*, *International Review of Mission* 92:366 (July 2003): 299-314.

opment of a fully ecumenical theology. This was most clearly seen both in his ecclesiology and in his 'decision' to begin his trinitarian trilogy with pneumatology rather than with the theology proper. The pneumatology was launched first because of the pneumatological orientation nurtured by the Pentecostal tradition, while the ecclesiology, as we saw earlier (III), was shot through with pneumatological motifs and emphases.

In fact, as I suggested then, the strength of the ecclesiology was not only in its comprehensiveness (essential for an introductory textbook), but also in its suggestiveness for a systematic reconstruction of the doctrine of the church in pneumatological perspective (a pneumatological or Spirit-ecclesiology). In short, I am simply urging Kärkkäinen to return to and retrieve some of the Pentecostal trajectories articulated earlier in his theological career (e.g., *TPT*, part I) both to provide more concrete grounding for his ecumenical theology, and to reinvigorate the constructive dimension of his future theological work.

This brings me to the second set of questions I have, this time for Kärkkäinen as (an emerging) world theologian. This set of questions can also be explicated in terms of three interrelated questions: 1) what is needed to more fully unfold Kärkkäinen's nascent trinitarian theology of religions? 2) How does the fact that other religious traditions are similarly constituted by practices provide challenges for contemporary Christian theology of religions? 3) W(h)ither Kärkkäinen as a theologian of world religions in light of these challenges? Again, I address each briefly in order.

First, Kärkkäinen acknowledges at the end of *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* that he has only taken some first steps toward developing a more comprehensive trinitarian theology of religions. One of the important principles suggested in that last chapter, however, was to think of the relationship between Christianity and other religions as a kind of unity-in-diversity mirroring the triune communion. In this framework, the Trinity is the structuring principle for Christian faith even as it also 'pushes Christians to dialogue with other religions' (*TRP*, 163). Yet Kärkkäinen also realizes that this is an idealized model which calls for testing through engagement with the empirical religions.

If/when Kärkkäinen moves from ecumenical dialogue to actual interreligious dialogue and from ecumenical theology to a theology informed by the interfaith conversation, he may find himself stretched in one of three directions: a) toward Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, which threatens to collapse the differences between religions; b) toward Heim's trinitarian theology of religious ends, which threatens to collapse the unity-in-duality of eschatological scenarios deeply embedded in the theological tradition; or c) toward a kind of Hegelian synthesis (syncretism!), which (evangelical) theologians are rightly concerned about. This is because trinitarian theological reflection, sundered from the practices which nurture it, leads to abstract pronouncements regarding the religions similarly sundered from the practices which nurture these other faiths. The interfaith encounter adds increasing levels of theoretical and practical depth that illuminate our

basic understanding of other religious traditions, and in that sense, prolonged engagement with the interreligious dialogue will challenge our more abstractly formulated theologies of religions.

What I am saying here, of course, is that other faiths are constituted similarly by a complex web of practices—of liturgies, devotional life, symbols, institutions, commentarial activity, social configurations, economic habits, political stances, etc.—which inform their beliefs and doctrines.<sup>27</sup> Thus, one cannot sustain a theology of religions apart from the religions themselves. In other words, any worthwhile Christian theology of religions will eventually need to deal concretely with the actual beliefs and practices which constitute the world of the religions (just as any theology of science will need to deal with the actual sciences or any theology of culture will need to deal with actual cultures). When this happens, however, the complexity of the truth question thrown up by the plurality of religions is further exacerbated. Kärkkäinen rightly wishes, following Pannenberg and others, not to discard the question of truth amidst the plurality of religious claims. How to adjudicate these matters in the framework of *fides quaerens intellectum* is one of the foremost challenges for Christian theology in the twenty-first century.

This difficulty can be seen especially in light of the connection between religious beliefs and prac-

tices. Christian theological propositions—e.g., about the Trinity and the incarnation—make little sense outside of the larger narrative and practices from which they emerge. Similarly, the truth claims of other faiths are embedded in their narratives (worldviews) and practices (rituals, etc.). The problem is that truth claims are propositionally formulated, yet their nestedness within wider ways of life and thinking means that theology of religions has to go beyond, beneath, or behind the doctrinal claims of the religions in order to assess their truthfulness. But to do so requires that one enter into that other way of life, so to speak, in order for the sensibility of such claims to emerge within a participatory framework.

How can Christian theologians engage in that kind of interreligious encounter without compromising their distinctive religious commitments? Are Christian theologians only limited to inviting their dialogue partners from other faiths to enter into the Christian way of life and ‘taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps. 34:8), but prohibited from accepting the invitation from their dialogue partners to enter into and experience these other religious ways of life? And if Christian theologians do proceed in the latter direction, do we lapse into a kind of fideism amidst the multiplicity of truth claims in the world of religions?<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> As argued forcefully by George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> I expand on these matters elsewhere—e.g., Yong, ‘The “Baptist Vision” of James William McClendon, Jr.: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Response’, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37:2 (2002): 32–57, and ‘The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth and the Religions’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57:1 (2004): 1–25.

My response is that theology has always been an ongoing dialogue between the biblical/theological traditions and the contemporary situation. In the case of theology of religions, the dialogue must now be extended to engage the beliefs and practices of religious others. Hence the importance of further refining the discipline of comparative theology for any Christian theology desiring to take into account the world context. The key to a comparative theology is its dialogical and intersubjective character. Theological and doctrinal statements are compared at various levels, only through a sustained process of dialogue allowing a much deeper sense of familiarity to emerge among the dialogue partners about the wider framework of ideas (worldviews) and practices within which fundamental religious beliefs are embedded.<sup>29</sup> I suggest that this kind of intersubjectively engaged project in comparative theology is necessary if we want to really honour the beliefs and practices of religious others, if we wish to remain vulnerable to transformative learning, and if we have an authentically eschatological horizon that frames our quest for theological truth.<sup>30</sup>

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29 For an example of such a venture in comparative theology, see the three volumes of The Comparative Religious Ideas Project: Robert Cummings Neville and Wesley J. Wildman, eds., *Ultimate Religious*, *The Human Condition*, and *Religious Truth* (all published by Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

30 I defend this proposal at much greater length in the concluding chapter of my *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), ch. 7.

Against this backdrop, w(h)ither Kärkkäinen as a world theologian? Two paths forward suggest themselves. On the one hand, Kärkkäinen could continue in his attempt to develop a Christian theology of other religions for Christians. This would not require that he 'get his hands' (too) dirty with actual engagement with those in other faiths. Technically, this move would also limit Kärkkäinen to being a theologian of world Christianity, thus withering his prospects as a world theologian and a theologian of the world religions. Of course, such work—theology by the church and for the church—is necessarily, but it is also in some significant senses preliminary to the quest for truth that animates the theological quest.

On the other hand, Kärkkäinen could continue his project as a world Christian theologian by engaging with any and all who are interested in the subject matter of theology, including representatives from other faith traditions. This would lead to the kind of intersubjective mode of comparative theology sketched earlier. This move will, of course, allow the project of Kärkkäinen as world theologian to come to fruition, and that precisely because it propels Christian faith seeking understanding to pursue the theological truth question to the ends of the earth.

At this point in Kärkkäinen's theological career, then, my two suggestions are, seemingly, in contrary directions. On the one hand, I have encouraged Kärkkäinen to return to his Pentecostal roots, not merely to retrieve a sectarian theological identity (although in certain contexts needing the prophetic truth of the gospel, such



a sectarian identity is essential), but also to provide a confessional ground for the particularity of claims which constitute any constructive ecumenical theology. On the other hand, I have also encouraged Kärkkäinen to engage in the interreligious dialogue, not only to further establish his identity as a world theologian, but also because Christian faith presumes a universality to the gospel that cannot (and should not) back down in the face of alternative claims to truth.

How to reconcile these two? Perhaps no simplistic reconciliation is possible on this side of the *eschaton*, as theologians are called to live with both the particularity and the universality of the gospel message. Yet in the hands of good theologians, such a tension is not disabling, but rather provides the resources out of which truth is discerned. Kärkkäinen is such a theologian, and I am convinced his celebrating and inhabiting his Pentecostal habitus more fully will only stimulate his ecumenical theological program even as it will further ground his comparative theological engagement with the interreligious dialogue.

## VI—W(h)ither Evangelical Theology?

While Kärkkäinen is really still only a mid-career theologian with his magnum opus far ahead of him, I have nevertheless been already sufficiently encouraged and challenged by his work to ask about the question concerning the direction that evangelical theology needs to take in the twenty-first century. Allow me to approach this question from three directions: the

sociological, the methodological, and the theological. The following remarks are necessarily tentative, attempting to discern the most promising directions for the future of evangelical theology in light of Kärkkäinen's work to date.

From a sociological perspective, the identity of evangelicalism and of evangelical theology is seriously contested. The fundamentalist-evangelical divide has now proliferated into a spectrum that includes neo-evangelicals, post-conservative evangelicals, Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicals, ecumenical evangelicals, mainline evangelicals, and Pentecostals and charismatics, among other groups and movements. At this level, evangelicalism is too fragmented, and historians will debate endlessly the genealogies of the 'authentic' evangelicalism. Part of the problem is that each of these evangelical identities has been forged in different contexts, protesting different matters.

Yet it is also precisely this situation which illuminates for us the value of Kärkkäinen's work, especially the trinitarian trilogy and the textbook on ecclesiology. The ecumenical trajectory of these volumes provides us with one example of how to engage with difference: that of understanding it sufficiently so as to be able to describe it on its own terms. Critical engagement cannot proceed through straw-positions. Kärkkäinen's ecumenical approach to theology is suggestive for the future of evangelical theology precisely because it protests both against a sectarianism which refuses to take the contemporary context seriously, and against a liberal relativism which refuses to take the question of theo-

logical truth seriously.

This raises, of course, the methodological question for evangelical theology. Evangelicals have come to understand the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation not as a literal guideline that limits the sources for theological reflection, but as pointing to the recognition of scripture as authoritative norm for theology.<sup>31</sup> Yet what does this mean and how is this enacted in the practicing of theological reflection? Does scripture shape theology with its propositions (a la Carl Henry and others) or with its narrative (a la Gabriel Fackre and others)? Alternatively, is the normativeness of scripture connected with the trinitarian shape of the gospel and the narrative of the Father sending the Son by the power of the Spirit?<sup>32</sup>

I do not intend to address these issues comprehensively. But it is precisely evangelical disputes about theological method that force this question. I suggest, again, that Kärkkäinen's work proposes one way forward for evangelical theological method. We need a spectrum of approaches: biblical, historical, ecumenical, philosophi-

cal, cross-cultural, etc. It is also just as important that both ends of any spectrum are necessary for us to chart an evangelical middle ground. More conservative positions are reminders of the importance of past insights, even while more progressive alternatives would help us explore the acceptable limits of Christian theological discourse. Kärkkäinen's articulation of the pluralism of biblical data on any doctrine also helps us to see the perspectival nature of religious knowing that enriches rather than relativizes the theological task. Hence the diversity of Christian theologies provides a wealth of resources for evangelical theology in our time so long as, following Kärkkäinen's lead, we adhere to the authority of the scriptural norm, follow closely the consensus gained by the tradition, and engage new ideas and issues with careful discernment. The perennial challenge will be to articulate the unity of the faith in terms of its diversity. Embracing this challenge will invigorate evangelical theology, not to mention ecumenical theology and world theology.

Am I therefore suggesting that any evangelical theology must also be ecumenical and global? At one level, I am actually saying that any evangelical theology, concerned as it is with the relevance of the gospel message for the whole world, cannot but be ecumenical and global in its horizons. Further, from the pietist perspective, which informs Kärkkäinen's (and my own) Pentecostal tradition, to ask about the meaning of Jesus is to ask about the meaning of Jesus for us. Hence, what would Jesus mean to Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, among others? To ask the question about how

<sup>31</sup> For evangelical reconstructions of the doctrine of scripture, I have found most helpful William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> One example of such a construal of biblical normativity in terms of the gospel narrative is seen in the Reformed theologian, Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

theology today comprehends the identity of Jesus and the meaning of salvation as formulated through the ecumenical conversation (as Kärkkäinen did in *One with God*) leads to asking the related question about how a world theology might understand the identity of Jesus and the meaning of salvation as formulated through the interreligious encounter. In this case, does Kärkkäinen's *oeuvre* to date chart one way forward for evangelical theology as we anticipate the next few years and decades?

I therefore suggest that an authentically biblical, ecumenical, and world theology will be an evangelical theology. Put in other terms, an evangelical theology today will be faithful to the biblical narrative, will be ecumenical in scope according both to Jesus' prayer for the unity of the church and to St. Paul's metaphor about the church being one body constituted by many members, and will anticipate the possibility of the Spirit's speaking through any language, tribe, nation, and even religious tradition, even as this happened on the Day of Pentecost. I have presented Kärkkäinen as modelling one way forward for evangelical theology. Readers who have persevered through this essay should now turn to Kärkkäinen himself for the details of such a vision for evangelical theology in the twenty-first century.<sup>33</sup>

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33 My thanks to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen for looking over Sections II-IV to ensure that I have not misrepresented his work; yet I take full responsibility for the ideas in these pages.

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