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Jesus' Questions

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I Enculturated Consciousness

Jesus used questions as a way of countering the enculturated consciousness of his day. Enculturated consciousness is consciousness shaped by culture and traditions absorbed during our formative years and to a significant degree it programs our everyday behaviour. It can have elements closely aligned with Biblical teaching but also elements that are diametrically opposed to kingdom principles. It often defines who we are and how we view others and the world. It shapes our views of what is good, right and beautiful. It can also be an obstacle to growth, and can marginalize whole groups of people. Jesus sought to crack conventional thinking and move people toward kingdom ways of thinking; from thinking dominated by culture to a worldview centred in God.

Examples of enculturated consciousness abound both in ancient and

in modern times. The ancients typically believed that sickness, poverty, and misfortune were the result of wrong living. Health and wealth were the reward of the righteous. Holiness came to be associated with separation from all that was unclean or impure. Impurity could even come from one's parents. Holiness came to mean separation rather than seeking unity. The Jewish view of Gentiles is another example of enculturated consciousness that Jesus sought to change. In the modern world we enculturate stereotypes involving skin colour, class, ethnic group, place of origin, and gender and use them as markers of character and values. We unknowingly apply these same stereotypes to ourselves.

I did not discover some of my American attitudes until I began working with tribal minorities in Mindanao. Growing up in America, I often heard, 'Work hard and you'll get ahead,' but few thought critically about those who worked hard and didn't get ahead. So we thought if you're poor it's because you didn't work hard. Another example of enculturated consciousness in

we keep quiet about apartheid, drug trafficking, destruction of nature, and the horrible problem of external debt? We are using time and energy for our in-house discussions while the world goes straight to hell and becomes a hell.²⁷

After two Lausanne Congresses and all the water that has run under the bridge, it is not difficult to see that the discussion has not brought a clear-cut solution. Questions are complex especially when trans-cultural factors are involved. Even after more than three decades, the issues Padilla and Escobar raised at Lausanne I remain current. At least in Latin America the situation is worse than in 1974. Poverty has expanded, violence is rampant, and corruption is endemic, while the evangelical church, in general, has not assumed the challenge of involvement in these issues.

The hope is that this Congress will move from the trend of previous gatherings. There are small breezes of change.²⁸ It is encouraging to see what the Lausanne Theological Working Group is doing under the leadership of Chris Wright.²⁹ We pray for the wind of the Spirit to take us to new dimensions of incarnation and commitment.

Lausanne III has a great opportunity to affect evangelicals around the world to incarnate the Kingdom's values with compassion and Christian love to people in need. The challenge for Cape Town 2010 is to move from meetings and publications to a solid plan of action so that the 'Whole Church' lives out the 'Whole Gospel' in the 'Whole World'.

²⁸ For example, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Holistic Mission. Occasional Paper No. 33* (Pattaya, Thailand: 2004).

²⁹ See the October 2007 and January 2009 issues of *Evangelical Review of Theology* with the papers from the February 2007 consultation in Limuru, Kenya and the February 2008 consultation in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

²⁷ Steuernagel, 'Preguntas a Lausana II,' 257.

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America was manifest destiny—the idea that God wanted America to ‘bless’ the world through its dominance.

I also discovered that there is an enculturated consciousness here in the Philippines. One Bagobo student believed that his people were the ‘true’ Filipinos. Others had deeply enculturated views of their place in society. Those who worked the land often shied away from bringing change saying ‘*mangooma lang ko*’ (I’m just a farmer) or ‘*babaye lang ko*’ (I’m just a woman). The boundaries of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) were seldom questioned and those who held the power felt justified to use this value to their advantage.

Jesus sought to transform the way people thought about God, about life, themselves and the world around them. By his teaching he sought to develop a consciousness based on the kingdom of God. To deal with the enculturated consciousness of his day Jesus used probing questions, pregnant stories, enigmatic parables, as well as direct experience in transforming the enculturated consciousness of the Jewish people. The purpose of this article is to focus on Jesus’ questions and their relationship to the ministry of teaching.

‘Jesus demanded that his listeners part the veil of conventional wisdom to expose the divine reality that he called the kingdom of God,’¹ to question the common assumptions, and to examine cultural patterns. The coming of the kingdom meant a new way of thinking

and Jesus re-socialized his disciples into these new ways. Some cultural assumptions are just expressions of local preferences, others are diabolical and hegemonic.

Enculturated consciousness—the common assumptions and unquestioned rules of Jewish society—functioned to oppress and exploit the poor among whom Jesus walked.² Jesus’ teaching was situated in the context of an agrarian society in which the ruling aristocracy oppressed the peasants. Conventional wisdom supported the power structure.

Jesus taught ‘new values, new assumptions, new strategies for social and personal transformation.’³ His social aim was to instil in his listeners a ‘transformation of perception,’ a new way of seeing that would replace a consciousness dominated by hegemony of conventional wisdom. Hegemonic assumptions are those that we believe represent commonsense wisdom and that we accept as being in our own interests without realizing that these same assumptions actually work against us in the long term by serving the interests of those opposed to us.⁴

The kingdom also meant a new way of teaching and preaching. Jesus taught that growth progresses from the inside out. He tells a group of Pharisees that they must ‘First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may also become clean’ (Mt. 23:25-26). He challenged people to think

about how they think. He challenged the people, ‘Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?’ (Lk. 12:57). Why do you rely upon others to determine right from wrong, Jesus seems to ask? Wink understands the developmental implications of this question: ‘Such a challenge requires a maturity in human beings not easily achieved.’⁵

There is a genuine spirituality in examining our enculturated consciousness, both in affirming what is good and confronting what is evil. We cannot and should not just put aside our enculturated patterns, but we should examine them. Jesus, after all, remained a Jew. Mature believers can step back from their culture and themselves and critique from a kingdom perspective. A kingdom perspective allows people to become critical evaluators and redeemers of their culture.

Transformative learning takes place when there is an internal shift in our frame of reference. In the story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32), the father does not judge his son’s errant behaviour by conventional standards, but rather compassionately and unconditionally welcomes him home. In love this old man sets aside his dignity and *runs* to his prodigal son, hugs and kisses him. In the story of the great feast (Lk. 14:16-24), the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame—in other words the impure and unholy—are invited to dine at a great banquet. Conventional wisdom would have allowed only the healthy and wealthy to participate. In the story of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk. 18:10-14), it is the humble sinner who is favoured by God

over the one who self-righteously adheres to the dictates of custom and law. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), the conventional understanding of who will go to heaven is reversed.

Perhaps it is in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37) that Jesus’ transformational teaching is most apparent. Jesus does not directly answer the question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Rather, he redirects attention by asking, ‘Who proved to be neighbour to the man?’⁶ This is the key to discovering Jesus’ transformational intentions. Jesus invites his listeners to distance themselves from the rules and roles of conventional wisdom. Jesus consciously and purposefully taught in a manner designed to transform his listeners’ enculturated consciousness. If Jesus wanted to simply teach neighbourliness his main character would have been a Jew instead of a Samaritan. A neighbour is, ‘even one who is as much an enemy as the Samaritan is a neighbor.’⁷

How do we counter the enculturated consciousness dominant in our churches, schools, and ourselves? Jesus’ questions challenged people to realign their thinking and cultural patterns with the kingdom of God, from worldly thinking to divine wisdom. He used questions and counter questions in a variety of situations and settings throughout the gospels. He was not just concerned with ‘what to think’ but ‘how to think.’ Jesus’ use of questions

1 Stephen Spear, ‘The Transformation of Enculturated Consciousness in the Teachings of Jesus’, *Journal of Transformative Education* 3 (2005), 357.

2 Spear, *Transformation*, 358.

3 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 135.

4 Wink, *Engaging*, 137.

5 Wink, *Engaging*, 123.

6 Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 231.

7 Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 231.

shows that he was not primarily concerned that his listeners acquire knowledge but rather that they change the way they thought; that they be transformed from 'a life in the world of conventional wisdom to a life centered in God.'⁸

Many of the people of Jesus' day were like old wineskins (Lk. 5:36-39), unable to stretch enough to accommodate the new wine of his teaching. They were spiritually moribund, unable to expand their thinking and see beyond the norms of their day. The coming of the kingdom was a hinge point in history yet the hearts and minds of the Jews were like old rusty hinges, unable to move. Jesus often used penetrating questions to provoke thinking. So much of what we focus on has to do with factual knowledge—memory verses or procedural 'how to' patterns. Relatively seldom do we learn to question our own preunderstandings about ourselves, our world, and our roles in demonstrating the kingdom of God. Jesus may have followed a form of Socratic questioning. Socrates taught by asking questions and thus drawing out (Greek, *ex duco*—to lead out, is the root of 'education') answers from his pupils. His overall purpose was to challenge conventional thinking and bring about better understandings.

II What Kinds of Questions Did Jesus Use?

Jesus recognized that developing a new order requires intentionally creating a degree of dis-equilibrium or cognitive

dissonance.⁹ Mezirow calls this process perspective transformation, which usually is triggered by a disconcerting dilemma.¹⁰ Many of Jesus' questions were designed to begin the process of perspective transformation. Jesus asked a lot of questions. We tend to spend a great deal of time on proclamation and not enough time raising questions. In order to think Christianly we must first raise mind-changing questions. Below is a categorization of the kinds of questions Jesus asked.

1 Questions for Focus and Clarification

Jesus asked many questions to give focus and clarification—too many for us to discuss them all. They gave focus to the proceeding discussion. Several times he uses the phrase, 'What do you think?' Or 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?' (Lk. 13:18). Jesus challenged the blind men to verbalize their desire. 'What do you want me to do for you?' (Mt. 20:32). A sick woman touched Jesus' garment seeking healing. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around to the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' (Mk. 5:30). This simple question gave focus to an almost imperceptible event.

It was the question, not the event itself, that brought attention to the miracle and the faith of the now healed woman. Jesus' final question to Judas

⁹ Chet Myers, *Teaching Students to Think Critically: A Guide for Faculty of all Disciplines* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988), 14.

¹⁰ Jack Mezirow, *Transformation Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

brings tremendous focus and clarity to Judas' actions, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' (Lk. 22:48). 'Judas, is this really what you want to do?'

Jesus also challenged the temple guard in Gethsemane by calling attention to their inappropriate actions; 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?... But this is your hour when darkness reigns!' (Lk. 22:51). Before the feeding of the four thousand, Jesus asked, 'How many loaves do you have?' 'Seven,' they replied, 'and a few small fish.'" (Mt. 15:34). Again at the feeding of the five thousand Jesus asked, 'How many loaves do you have? When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish"' (Mk. 6:38).

Jesus uses these events later to ask questions on a deeper level. On the road to Emmaus he enters into the discussion asking the disciples, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' (Lk. 24:17). In each case Jesus' question gives focus and clarity to what is to come.

2 Questions from Deep Disappointment

Jesus often challenged his disciples to evaluate their own dullness and lack of understanding. After feeding the five thousand and the four thousand Jesus chided, 'Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?' (Mk. 8:17). Jesus questions, at times, had a judgmental tone. When his disciples could not heal an epileptic boy Jesus commented, 'O unbelieving and perverse generation,... How long should I put up with you?' (Mt. 17:17).

Sometimes his questions echoed deep disappointment. In Gethsemane he chided his disciples, 'Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?' (Mt. 26:40). At times his questions were deeply biting. Ending his seven woes sermon he chided the spiritual leaders, 'You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?' (Mt. 23:33).

Disappointed over Nicodemus's lack of spiritual insight, he asked, 'You are Israel's teacher, and do you not understand these things?' (Jn. 3:10). Nicodemus is confused but Jesus expected more of him. 'I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?' (Jn. 3:12). Disappointed over the spiritual dullness of the people he shouts, 'Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?' (Lk. 12:56).

He compares the Jews lack of obedience to a builder who built a house on sand. 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say?' (Lk. 12:46). His words were meant to be like a foundation in rock, but many chose to build their lives on sand. During his crucifixion Jesus expresses deep disappointment over the state of humankind. 'For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?' (Lk. 23:31). He is saying, if people do these things while I am with them, what will they do during evil times?

3 Questions Challenging Tradition and Authority

Criticizing the religious leaders for their spiritual blindness, Jesus asks, 'Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?' (Lk. 6:39). Jesus entered into a number of controversies with the Pharisees over appropriate behaviour on the Sabbath. The conventional wisdom of the day had turned the Sabbath into a burden instead of a blessing. During one of these Sabbath controversies Jesus heals a man and asks the synagogue, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' (Mk. 3:4).

After healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath the Pharisees again were indignant. Jesus shows their inconsistency saying, 'Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?' (Lk. 12:15). Later he gets directly to the point, demanding their response, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?' (Lk. 14:3). The same inconsistency is brought out by Jesus' question, 'If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?' (Lk. 14:5).

First century Judaism regulated a host of religious behaviours with which Jesus took issue, including fasting, ethnic and gender barriers, the use of the temple for commercial purposes and other applications of the Law. When Jesus is asked why he and his disciples do not fast, he answers with an analogy embedded in a question: 'How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is still with them?' (Mt. 9:15). His question is cryptic but thought provok-

ing, comparing his presence to that of being with one's newly married close friend. Challenging ethnic and gender barriers he simply asks a Samaritan woman, 'Will you give me a drink?' (Jn. 4:7) and as a result a whole town is converted. As he cleansed the temple of the moneychangers, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations," but you have made it "a den of robbers?"' (Mk. 11:17). Their tradition of money changing in the Court of the Gentiles was in contradiction to God's global kingdom purposes.

In the story of the woman caught in adultery the Pharisees sought to advance their strict interpretation of the Law. Jesus asked the woman, 'Where are they? Has no one condemned you?' (Jn. 8:10) and that day mercy reigned over Law. Jesus, concerned with the Pharisees twisted understanding of the Law, asks a rhetorical question, 'Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law' (Jn. 7:19). He brings them to recognize their own hypocrisy—so much focus on the law but without following it themselves.

The kingdom required faithful workers so Jesus challenged the religious leaders regarding their failures. In the parable of the evil tenants he makes the Pharisees condemn themselves for not respecting the owner of the vineyard (God the Father himself) and for killing His Son. He asks, 'Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' (Mt. 21:40).

Conversely Jesus' disciples are to be faithful servants always ready for the Lord's return. 'Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master

puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?' (Lk. 12:42). Unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus' disciples were to conduct themselves as a faithful household manager attending to his duties.

4 Questions about his own Nature and Identity

Gauging the disciples' understanding of his messiahship Jesus asked, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' (Mt. 16:13). 'Who do you say I am?' (Mt. 16:15). This question led to Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah. After Jesus called himself 'the Bread of Life coming down from heaven' (Jn. 6:58), his disciples were disgruntled. He asked them, 'Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?' (Jn. 6:61-62). By asking this question he sets the stage for authenticating his claim. After healing the paralytic Jesus said to the Pharisees, 'Which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Get up and walk?"' (Mt. 9:5). Neither is easy to say, but one is more identifiable than the other. This incident connected Jesus' healing ministry as proof of his ability to forgive sin.

Jesus questioned the Pharisees who said his power was demonic, 'If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How can his kingdom stand?' (Mt. 12:26). The kingdom of God is diametrically opposed to the kingdom of Satan. To claim the work of God as the work of Satan is blasphemy. Jesus is using simple logic to show their thinking is self-contradictory.

After Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant Jesus asks him,

'Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?' (Jn. 18:11). In other words, Peter, don't you understand, as Messiah I came for this time of suffering? On the road to Emmaus he asks the disciples, 'Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' (Lk. 24:26). These questions were designed by Jesus to guide the disciples' thinking regarding his true identity. So often we make evangelistic proclamations without helping people raise the appropriate questions. A question approach may receive grater resonance with people.

5 Questions Challenging Values

Regarding materialism Jesus challenged his disciples, 'What good would it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?' (Mt. 16:26). Questions like this challenge our fundamental values and help us realign our thinking and behaviour toward kingdom values.

Regarding forgiveness Jesus asks, 'If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go look for the one that wandered off?' (Mt. 18:12, Lk 15:4). This parable is applied to two groups: the powerless, i.e. the 'little ones,' and the sinners. Jesus uses the common shepherding practice to show the importance of restoration as kingdom ministry. The same kind of question is asked regarding the parable of the woman who has lost a coin. 'Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?' (Lk. 15:8).

After telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus queries, Who was 'a neighbour to the man who fell into the

hands of the robbers?' (Lk. 10:36). He raises consciousness regarding neighbourliness but by making a Samaritan the hero he challenges Jewish racial biases. In the same vein he asks, 'If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?' (Mt. 5:46-47). Jesus healed ten lepers but only one, a Samaritan, returns and is profusely thankful. Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?' (Lk. 17:17). Again the focus on a foreigner confronts the enculturated consciousness of the day.

Criticizing the Pharisees for their emphasis on outward forms of holiness but harbouring wickedness inside, Jesus chides, 'Did not the one who made the outside [of the cup] make the inside also?' (Lk. 11:40). The Pharisees valued outward appearances but neglected inward holiness. Jesus' question shows the importance of both. Their shallow focus affected their faith. Jesus asked, 'How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?' (Jn. 5:44).

The Jews believed there was a direct correlation between the degree of one's suffering or blessing and the depth of one's sin or righteousness. They valued the 'good life' because it showed the blessing of God. Pilate had killed some Galileans and used their blood in a pagan sacrifice. Conventional wisdom probably emphasized something regarding punishment for hidden sin. Thus Jesus asks, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse

sinner than all the other Galileans because they suffered in this way?' (Lk. 13:2).

Religious values focused more on being served than on serving. Jesus sought to reverse the hierarchical values of both Jewish and Gentile societies with his example of servanthood. He asks [and answers], 'Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?.... But I am among you as one who serves' (Lk. 22:27). In applying the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus asks, 'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?"' (Mt. 25:37). With this question Jesus connects righteousness with servanthood rather than status.

The Pharisees valued judging others. 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?' (Mt. 7:3). Jesus is not saying don't make judgments. He is saying we cannot make godly judgments unless we deal with the attitudes, biases and sins that cloud our own vision.

6 Questions that are Evasive

Jesus sometimes answered questions with questions to show the Pharisees their own inconsistency. When asked about the source of his authority Jesus does not answer directly. 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me I will tell you' (Mt. 21:24). Jesus then asks a question to corner the Pharisees. 'John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?' Mt. 21:24). If John's authority is from God and he pointed people to Jesus, then Jesus' authority

must also be from God. The Pharisees cannot answer without incriminating themselves.

The Pharisees, trying to trip Jesus up with their carefully formulated questions, ask him if it's right to pay taxes to Caesar. A yes or a no answer would have delighted the Pharisees. To a Jew God was their only king, to pay a tax to another king is an insult to God. Jesus shows a coin and asks, 'Who's portrait is on it? And who's inscription?' (Mt. 22:20, Mk. 12:13-17). In so doing he doesn't answer their question but he recognizes both the authority of God and of Caesar. This response shaped the thinking of Simon (the Zealot for Jewish independence) who later wrote, 'fear God, honour the king' (1 Pet. 2:17).

7 Questions to Activate Faith and Commitment

Jesus tested the faith of the blind and mute, asking first, 'Do you believe I am able to do this?' (Mt. 9:28). After healing the man born blind Jesus asks, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' (Jn. 9:35). After calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asks his disciples, 'Where is your faith?' (Lk. 8:25). At the grave of Lazarus Jesus tells Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me... will never die. Do you believe this?' (Jn. 11:25-26). Each of these questions activate faith by giving focus to God's work in specific contexts.

Jesus was criticized by Simon the Pharisee for allowing a 'sinful woman' to anoint his feet. Jesus told a short story of a man who owed a small amount and a man who owed ten times more. The moneylender forgave both

debts. Then he asked Simon the Pharisee, 'Now which of them will love him more?' (Lk. 7:42). Assuming Simon understood he would have realized this 'sinful woman' was expressing her love to the One who forgave her great debt. After the Apostle Peter's three-fold denial the resurrected Jesus asks him three times, 'Simon do you love me?' (Jn. 21:15-17). The thrice repeated question perhaps demonstrated Jesus' full forgiveness of the three-fold denial.

On counting the cost of discipleship Jesus uses question parables to challenge his audience. 'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost...?' (Lk. 14:28). The same idea is found in his question, 'Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able...?' (Lk. 14:31). Talking to his disciples about his suffering, he asked, 'Can you drink of the cup I am going to drink?' (Mt. 20:22). Jesus questioned Peter, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!' (Jn. 13:38).

There were massive injustices in ancient Israel—a land dominated by a colonial power, a land where the great majority were peasants and a few are wealthy and powerful. In the story of the persistent widow and the unjust judge Jesus asks, 'And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?' (Lk. 18:6). He challenges them to persistently look to the One who brings justice.

In a poor land daily provision is a test of faith. Jesus reminds his disci-

ples of their faith experiences, 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' (Lk. 22:35). They answered, 'No.' In his Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:26-31) Jesus asks a series of probing questions on faith and provision.

Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Of course the same message could have been given in a declarative mode but Jesus chose questions to ignite their own thinking. Faith in this sense is not blind but rather a reasoned choice. After seeing the same miracle twice Jesus seeks to consolidate the disciples faith. 'When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?' 'Twelve,' they replied. 'And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?' They answered, 'Seven' (Mk. 8:19-20). Jesus' questions point them to their own experiences as a basis for their faith.

8 Deeply Penetrating Questions

Jesus' first question as a boy in the temple is at first glance curious, but eventually deeply insightful for his parents. This question sets the stage for

his future ministry. 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' (Lk. 2:49). This is not the snide remark of a budding teenager. At this event, his first Passover, the twelve-year-old Jesus became a 'son of the law.' During the Passover the Sanhedrin was available in the temple to dialogue with the public and the young Jesus amazed them with his insights. Jesus is saying his parents should have known where he was. His query to his parents also demonstrates a growing sense of his own identity, distinguishing between his Father—God, and his father—Joseph.

Showing his solidarity with the people of the kingdom, Jesus used a rhetorical question, 'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?' (Mt. 12:48). He answers gesturing to his disciples, 'See, my mother and my brothers.' (Mt. 12:49). As many of us have experienced, Jesus' family did not share his vision. Jesus' question reminds us that we have two families, one biological and one spiritual. Our solidarity must ultimately be with our spiritual brothers and sisters.

About to be stoned by the unbelieving Jews, Jesus challenged, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' (Jn. 10:32). Jesus had just claimed that he is one with the Father, making himself equal with God. His question brings to a head his claims. He is challenging the Jews, if you don't believe my claim, believe the works I do.

The most penetrating question Jesus asked was on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt. 27:46). The Gospel itself is, of

course, the answer to Jesus' question. Jesus simultaneously experiences the agony of human suffering and the depth of separation from God as he took on the sin of mankind.

III How do Jesus' Questions Teach us to Teach?

Certainly much has been written on Jesus' teaching style. Seminary students often say they want to teach as Jesus did. They usually do not consider the contextual nature of his teaching style, not realizing that if he were teaching in today's world with its many cultures and people groups, his style would likely be varied. Nonetheless there are some more-or-less universal principles we can deduce from a study of his questions.

1. *Provoke Kingdom Thinking:* A change of thinking and behaviour often requires penetrating questions that expose our own shallowness. Just as Jesus used questions to provoke kingdom thinking, we need to guide people beyond their enculturated consciousness. A teacher might ask, 'What are signs of the Kingdom around our community?'
2. *Seek Transformation:* Ask questions that help move people toward personal and social transformation. 'How might we make this community look a little more like heaven?'
3. *Address the 'Why' Questions:* So much teaching in our churches has to do with the 'what' and 'how' of church culture. Use questions to get to the 'why' issues of the Christian life. 'Why do we find

so much division among Christian groups?'

4. *Laggards:* Some people will always prefer old wineskins. It is unlikely they will embrace the new. Focus on people who are interested in bringing kingdom changes to their world. 'What new things would God have us do for his Kingdom this year?'
5. *Deep Issues:* Use questions to bring focus and clarification to the deep issues of the Christian life. 'Why is it that there are some areas of our lives and personalities that we don't seem to be able to change?'
6. *Disappointment:* Jesus used questions to express deep disappointment. Though we need to exercise care, this kind of question is meant to be a wake-up call for our calcified congregations. Habakkuk begins his oracle, 'How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?'
7. *Challenge Tradition:* Jesus used questions to challenge tradition and authority that ran counter to kingdom values. Though we should choose our battles carefully we should not shirk from our responsibility by preaching nice homilies. 'Are our traditions alienating unbelievers? The younger generation?'
8. *Evangelistic Questions:* Jesus used questions as an invitation to probe his nature and identity. Connected with stories this method is an excellent evangelistic tool. 'If Jesus were here today what would he be like and what would be his message?'
9. *Detractors:* We will always have

detractors. Questions that are evasive may provoke thought and eventually win our detractors. 'That's a good question. I'm not sure how to answer. What do you think?'

10. *Activate Faith*: Jesus used questions to activate faith and commitment. Jesus wanted people to

make up their own minds. He nurtured their thinking by challenging conventional wisdom and setting the stage for spiritual growth. 'Do you believe that God can change our city? What role do you see the church playing to bring change?'

Book Review Article

Restoring, Reforming, Renewing: Accompaniments to *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*¹

Amos Yong

THE *CCET* BEGINS with an introductory essay by Timothy Larsen wrestling with and proposing a working definition of 'evangelical' for this project; the remaining seventeen essays are divided into two parts: the first on 'doctrines' has eight essays (on Trinity, scripture, Christ, theological anthropology, justification/atonement, Holy Spirit, conversion/sanctification, and ecclesiology) while the second on "contexts" has nine essays (on culture, gender, race, the religions, and evangelical theology in, respectively, Africa, Asia, Britain/Europe, Latin America, and North America). The perspectives of eighteen different essayists, including four women, from a range of evangeli-

cal backgrounds—Reformed, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, Baptist, etc.—are registered in the book.

One way to read the *CCET* is as a performative speech act in three keys: a restorative one oriented to the past, a reformative one focused on the present, and a renewal one hopeful about the future. Sometimes one of these keys is out of harmony with the other two, but taken together, I suggest they reflect the opportunities and challenges of the ongoing task of contemporary evangelical theology as a live project. Let me explain.

Restoring

First, the restorative key should come to no surprise for a book on evangelical theology. Given evangelicalism's institutional emergence from out of the fundamentalist side of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies in the first half of the twentieth century, evangelical theology has always been conserv-

¹ Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). All quotations from this volume will be referenced parenthetically in the text by *CCET* and page number.

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