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"Conversation" as a Theological Metaphor and a Contemporary Theological Trend

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There are indications that a trend exists in contemporary theology that focuses a great deal of attention on "conversation." Many of the recent theology books that focus on "conversation" are not merely academic but are written for lay people and fall under the rubric of pop Christian literature. The interest in "conversation" extends to topics such as the emerging church, Pauline studies, the relationship between science and religion and classical theological *loci*. This study briefly examines the world behind the conversation, the world of the conversation, and the world in front of the conversation.

Introduction

There are indications that a trend exists in contemporary theology that focuses a great deal of attention on "conversation." The titles of recent theology books exhibit one side of this trend. It is important to note that many of these books that focus on "conversation" are not merely academic but are written for laypeople and fall under the rubric of pop Christian literature.[1] The trend is also visible in books from both evangelical and mainline denominations.[2] The interest in conversation extends into academic topics such as Pauline studies, the relationship between science

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[1] Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999; Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

[2] Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003; Don Saliers and Henry H. Knight III, *The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk With One Another*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999.

and religion and classical theological loci such as atonement. Changes are also occurring in pulpits. Confrontational tones that have traditionally characterized (at least some part) of traditional preaching are intentionally moving toward "conversation." The amorphous emerging and emergent church movements use the word "conversational" to describe themselves as well (and may even deny that a conversation can be a movement).[3] While some of this trend is located within the emerging/emergent conversations, it extends beyond their borders.

What exactly is meant by "conversation"? Before asking how Christians are using it in contemporary theology, it will be beneficial to understand how conversation is understood in broader contexts.

A common synonym for conversation is "dialogue."[4] There are several pictures of the word "conversation" that can help us to grasp what is being referenced. Irene Clark uses the imagery of a "conversation" to characterize the nature of writing a thesis or dissertation.[5] A dissertation consists in listening to all of the other people and then making your own contribution. Or, one could view conversation and philosophy in this vein. Perhaps the best way to describe philosophy in a nutshell is to use the word "conversation."[6] There is no preaching in philosophy per se, only dialogue. Another picture is that of a person who is a "chatter." According to the *Dictionary of Bias-Free Usage,* this is a sexist term and its usage "implies a certain value judgment- that the conversation is trivial and irrelevant."[7] Here we see that conversation has a range of value. In yet a different

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[3] Brian Mclaren, *Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 152; Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 24.

[4] John W. Collins III and Nancy P. O'Brien, *The Greenwood Dictionary of Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003), 106.

[5] Irene Clark, *Writing the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Entering the Conversation*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006.

[6] Norman Melchert, *The Great Conversation: Hesiod through Descartes*, Columbus, OH: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

[7] Rosalie Maggio, *The Dictionary of Bias-Free Usage: A Guide to Nondiscriminatory Language* (Phoenix, AZ: Oryx, 1991), 64.

picture of conversation, the *Routledge Dictionary of Economics* portrays "conversation" as a methodology. It is explained that economics in general can be seen as "rhetoric" or a "disciplined form of conversation."[8]

These images from disciplines as varied as dissertation writing and philosophy help us to identify crucial characteristics of "conversation" as currently understood outside of theological circles. They help to develop a "thick" picture of what conversation can refer to. First, a conversation views all parties as equal members.[9] Ideally, a conversation has an equal balance of power between all participants.[10] Second, a conversation can refer to a variety of speech-acts, from the important to the trivial. Third, as seen in the reference to economics, conversation can be used as a metaphor for an approach or methodology.

The World of The Conversation

What is important is to understand how Christians are viewing their own "conversations." Important questions include: Where are conversations taking place? Who is involved in conversations? What conflicts arise from particular types of conversation? What are the dynamics of a conversation? And, how are conversations received? The approach of this section seeks to look at particular examples of conversation as they occur in contemporary Christian literature. By answering the questions above in this manner, a sketch of a theological trend can be drawn.

Engaging the Unchurched

What is striking is that some Christians find conversations so important that they are willing to try and make other speech-acts, such as

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[8] Donald Rutherford, *Routledge Dictionary of Economics* (London: Routledge), 139.

[9] Collins and O'Brien, *The Greenwood Dictionary of Education*, 106.

[10] In the 17th century "converse" came to mean to talk together. Prior to this it referred to act of living or physically being among others (turning about). Joseph T. Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (NY: Philosophical Library, 1945), 95.

preaching, appear conversational. This appears in churches who take great strides to get unchurched people into their walls. For the purposes of this study, unchurched people are defined as those who are willing to attend church services, but do not have a strong Christian background. Whether or not they exist, they are an assumed demographic by many churches.

Whereas traditional preaching has been willing to use tonal inflections to emphasize authority and the need for change to take place as a response to hearing it, conversational preaching only uses "normal tone of voice."[11] This is not just avoiding 'thees' and 'thous,' but an attempt to appeal to the unchurched who do not want to hear "religious" language.[12] Thus, being "conversational" includes pushing the boundaries of what is traditionally understood as a conversation. To use conversational tone to mask preaching reveals a contrast and a presupposition that conversation and preaching are antithetical. Brian McLaren cites Walter Brueggemann approvingly in his reference to the search for a "new kind of preaching."[13] Both view preaching that "is capable of inviting persons to join in another conversation" as characterized by poetics over prose.[14] This intentionally moves away from the modern penchant for the propositions and rationality of prose. In many "conversational" contexts, conversation is privileged so that other speech-acts are ignored.

Engaging the Churched

One must not suppose that conversational speech-acts are prized only in churches with an emphasis on "seekers" or unchurched. Some view "conversation" as a metaphor that represents an antithesis to "pulpit-centric

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[11] G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 130. Also, Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 193.

[12] Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, 130. Also, Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 173.

[13] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 146-7.

[14] Ibid., 146.

preaching."[15] The way to engage and grow the churched (established Christians) is through conversation-preaching which is characterized by interaction. The goal is, "Conversation rather than [a] talking head."[16] As postmodernity turns toward narrative over and against reason, a sermon from an authoritative speaker or "expert" is viewed as a dinosaur "inherited from a previous epoch."[17] Sweet explains, "vertical authorities like priests and professors have been replaced by peers."[18]

Conversational interactions may use imagery displayed on large screens or involve calling upon people who have raised hands to speak and/or ask questions. One preacher who uses large screens to display various pictures during the sermon calls them, "contributions to and animations of our conversation."[19] Chang suggests that the church modernize preaching by "entering the movie theater" and changing media.[20] The "Truth" that sets one free is not a result of dissecting a text for an audience via a monologue. Truth is not propositional and happens when "a body holds together its various parts in conversation and harmony."[21]

Engaging the Culture

Some models of Christian interaction with the culture are explicitly oriented around conversation. Gordon Lynch argues that an approach in which the culture is subjected to critique "on the basis of certain fixed theological beliefs and values" is invalid. He rejects such a position because "the ultimate arbiter of truth and goodness in this conversation

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[15] Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2007), 84-5.

[16] Spencer Burke, *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations About God, Community, and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 59.

[17] Curtis Chang, *Engaging Unbelief: A Captivating Strategy from Augustine to Aquinas* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 156.

[18] Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2000), 54.

[19] Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 85.

[20] Change, *Engaging Unbelief*, 157.

[21] Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 92.

comes from the preformed theological beliefs and values."[22] Lynch states that an engagement with culture using this approach is the "least dialogical."[23] In Lynch's "conversational model," both sides participate in a critical conversation.[24] The church is no longer the one "preaching." Where everyone can be critical and contribute to the conversation it is impossible for the church to view themselves as having a better or more pious vantage point. In the sense that everyone in the conversation is a critical contributor, everyone is a preacher.

Another dimension is present in the way "conversation" guides and adapts to interaction with the culture. Although Brian McClaren does not use the metaphor of a "conversation" directly, he alludes to it when he argues that future of Christianity lies in a "new rhetoric." This "new rhetoric" uses words to be "servants of mystery, not removers of it" and uses less Christian jargon and religious allusions; it is language that is "more common, more earthy."[25] In other words, in order to speak to the culture, we must learn the culture's language. Evangelism is not a "sales pitch" but rather a "conversation" that excludes being "preached to."[26] This move away from the language of modernity and Christendom not only rejects speaking "Christianese" to a pagan culture, but it adopts a view of language that emphasizes subjectivity and mystery.

"Conversation" is also a metaphor for the way in which Christian can engage a pluralistic culture. Some use conversation as inclusive of evangelism – but not an approach that focuses on the individual as a preacher. Richard Peace views evangelism as a "community activity" that

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[22] Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 102.

[23] Ibid., 102.

[24] Ibid., 105.

[25] Brian McClaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 89.

[26] Leonard Sweet, Brian Mclaren, Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 219.

requires learning the "art of holy conversation."[27] William Placher argues that we can no longer find a universal Archimedean point or universal set of principles. However, he denies that Christians are trapped in their own "current horizon."[28] Placher borrows from the work of Gadamer and argues that a "conversation" is a point where the horizons of the traditions of both speakers merge and find commonality. Such a conversation does not consist of "yelling" or "force or intimidation" and is as "open" as possible.[29] In the end, Placher's model looks similar to Lynch's in that Christianity and its appropriation of Enlightenment modernity must "take its place among the other voice, as often to be corrected as to correct."[30]

Engaging Theologians

The idea of conversation is also a guiding model in debates between theologians. The debate over Open Theism is a recent example of a great source of tension and dispute among Christians. One of the slew of books on topic is written by Christopher Hall and John Sanders, the former holding to a classical model of theism and the later holding to an openness model. The book offers 37 chapters with each author contributing to a "conversation."[31] The notion of a conversation expressed here does not preclude "vigorous argument or debate."[32] The introduction communicates the virtue of having "strong theological disagreements" that "never threatened our friendship."[33] The idea of a conversation is intertwined with the notion of friendship and solidarity. As Brian McClaren states, with regard to theological "conversation," "We are all in this together."[34]

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[27] Richard Peace, *Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 9-10.

[28] William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1989), 112.

[29] Ibid., 114-115.

[30] Ibid., 115.

[31] Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?: A Debate on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 7.

[32] Ibid., 7.

[33] Ibid., 7.

[34] McClaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 9.

To disrupt the friendship is to disrupt the ability to have a conversation. The goal is not to settle the dispute or to change the other's mind per se. Both Hall and Sanders state, "we did not see our conversation as a debate to be 'won' but as an opportunity to learn from one another."[35] Likewise Spencer Burke finds conversation to be exclusive of ecclesiastical separation and categories of heretic. He is seeking for, "An era where we can have meaningful, compassionate conversations with each other, no matter where our allegiances lie – modern or postmodern, Eastern Orthodox or Catholic, megachurch or house church."[36] This paradigm comports well with those who aver that Christianity must make a turn toward being post-Protestant, post-denominational, post-liberal and post-conservative.[37]

Engaging God

Conversation is used to describe engagement with God. This is used by those who stress the participatory or experiential side of faith. Leonard Sweet rejects the idea that God is "The Grand Master of Chess Moves, moving players around on the board of life."[38] Sweet argues that part of the work of Christian spirituality is moving beyond the notion that Jesus is a "Monologue" partner and replacing this with the concept of Jesus as "Conversation Partner."[39] Jesus himself is the "greatest of all metaphors."[40] Webber, for example, draws a dichotomy between Jesus as understood by traditional Christian dogma or propositional doctrine and the personal relationship one is offered with Jesus.[41] It is not always clear how this view of faith in Jesus is anything more than mysticism. One must simply accept this paradox as part of the nature of faith. One might say that

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[35] Hall and Sanders, *Does God Have a Future?*, 7.

[36] Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 20.

[37] Mclaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 66 cf. 140.

[38] Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 87.

[39] Ibid., 87.

[40] Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 65.

[41] Ibid., 69.

we have a personal relationship with a person (Jesus), about whom we can make no absolute propositions.

Summary

The "conversations" of contemporary Christian theology cannot be reduced so as to remove any distinctiveness, yet there are several common attributes. First, conversation is often viewed as antithetical to monologue. This necessitates that much of this study focus on preaching. Some go so far as to mask preaching with tonal inflections that are expected only of conversation. This hints at the fact that the metaphor is often totalized. Second, conversation is used as a metaphor to explain a variety of relationships. In some instances, it is used to explain how the church should engage culture. In Lynch's and Placher's conversational model of engagement, a "fusion of horizons" occurs wherein both popular culture and religious tradition stand on an equal plane.[42] A conversation can be used as a metaphor to explain how theologians should engage one another – disputes on any matter should handled civilly and neither side should seek to "win" the debate or find cause to disturb the friendship. Learning is privileged above all else. The conversation metaphor is also used to model how theologians should engage each other. This often precludes any speech-act in which one might coerce, stand, fight, pressure, or separate – actions one might link with the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy.[43]

In sum, one could argue that conversation is a "meta-metaphor" for cultural engagement. As a meta-metaphor, it is used to subsume all other metaphors underneath it. Stanley Grenz uses conversation in this manner when he states, "truly beneficial conversations should invite us to explore new metaphors that can assist us in revisioning who we are as the fellowship of Christ's disciples called to be a witnessing community within the emerging

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[42] Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, 107; Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 115.

[43] McClaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 179.

postmodern context."[44] Conversation eclipses all other metaphors so that even new metaphors are within or underneath it.

The World Behind the Conversation

Having noted that there is evidence of a trend to focus on "conversation," we noted several characteristics of the world *of* the conversation. Now we turn to the world *behind* the conversation. The purpose of this section is to understand the forces that lay behind this phenomenon. This is a small exercise in historiography. Admittedly, writing a history of the recent past is quite difficult. The closer one gets to the present, the more difficult it is to see where the implications for the future lie and what factors from the past contributed. Moreover, the wide expanse of this survey makes it difficult to examine a single relationship. One might argue, for example, that open theism has contributed in some way to the conversational trend. Because of space limitations this study focuses on the impact of metaphor, modernity, and heresy on the world behind the conversation.

The Impact of Metaphor

What aids the search for what lies behind the conversation is the intentionality with which the metaphor of conversation has been pursued. The trend of focusing on the metaphor of conversation is in large part a reaction and response to previous metaphors. It is clear that there is a trend toward rejecting metaphors that have been popular in previous generations. For example, Donald Miller rejects the war metaphor, wherein the church views itself as being in a war against sinners such as "liberals and homosexuals" to the exclusion of warring against "poverty and hate and injustice and pride and the powers of darkness."[45] Miller's position finds a flaw, not in the consistency of using the war metaphor, but in the metaphor itself.

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[44] Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 16.

[45] Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*, 132.

Spencer Burke argues that metaphors guide the identity of the church. He argues that metaphors of the church are "mental models" that "guide us in our everyday life."[46] It is metaphors that are key to moving the church in new directions during a time of transition from modernity to postmodernity. Burke finds metaphors to be more crucial to focus on than "theology" in this context.[47] He and others suggest that the church stop focusing on propositions, statements of faith and mission statements and replace them with a single "image statements" or image. Although Burke does not go on to suggest "conversation" as the single image statement, it helps to frame how it is possible that conversation could become such an important metaphor or "image statement."

The Impact of Modernity

While the topic of postmodernism is fraught with perils, the matter must be broached. Many who seek to redefine the church's engagement with society in terms of conversation can be characterized as postmodern. Many aspects of theology as mystery, paradox, and doubt take the place of eschatology and ecclesiology as theological loci. Indeed, many are fine taking upon the label of paradoxical. This is important because the very use of the conversation metaphor is itself quite modern. If postmodernity is the rejection of metanarratives, one would expect that conversation would be least on the list of viable metaphors. To use conversation exclusively or even to focus on it betrays an assumption that it is possible to communicate with those who are "other." It assumes that a dialogue can take place at all and this requires a metanarrative of some nature to serve as a bridge.

The Impact of Heresy

If the metaphor of conversation is a progressive or even an offensive position taken by some against the remnants of modernity, it should also be acknowledged as a defensive metaphor. Unlike other institutions such as philosophy departments, church leaders and theologians who openly seek to "deconstruct" or tear apart established doctrines of

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[46] Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 28.

[47] Ibid., 28.

heterodoxy have something to lose. The Christian church is inherently different from all other institutions in that it claims the ability to exercise discipline of a spiritual and eternal nature. Martin Luther and John Calvin argued over whether church discipline was a mark of a true church, but it was important for both nonetheless. Thus, when a Christian admittedly claims to write things some find a heretical, that person must either submit to discipline of some nature of make a defensive move.

The metaphor of conversation is a way to establish one's self as untouchable from the charge of heresy. One might hear the following claim: a conversation is, after all, *simply* a conversation.[48] Such a statement implies that the speech-act of conversation is mutually exclusive of making absolute truth claims, teaching authoritatively or claiming to have arrived at a conclusion. The imagery used can include a circle to express the indefiniteness of the conversation. This flows from the inherent equality between all partners in a conversation. If everyone is simply asking questions and discussing, there is little ground for making the charge that one is a false teacher or heretic. The very existence of the church and the existence of the category of heresy (or heretic) play an important role in shaping the metaphor of conversation.

The World in Front of the Conversation

The trend toward using "conversation" in Christian theology often reflects a desire to picture communication between the world and the church in a metaphor that all will understand. It is significant that the trend of "conversation" is itself a root metaphor. It is not always easy to encapsulate a trend in terms of a metaphor, but this work has already been done – intentionally so.[49]

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[48] Burke, *Making Sense of Church*, 30.

[49] For a discussion on root metaphors and cultural trends see Kevin Vanhoozer, Charles Anderson and Michael Sleasman, eds. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 237.

A Non-Historical Audience

Much of the audience that finds the notion of conversation appealing are people who find Christian spirituality neutered by logic, propositions, objectivity, Truth, and lack of relationality. They are an audience unfamiliar with the history of ideas and deeply committed to pragmatism and the comforts of an over-indulgent Western society. The utter neglect of church history is taking its toll. The audience that resonates with conversation imagery is often an audience willing to accept dichotomies that are not easily defendable from Scripture or reason. Many complaints about modern thought are legitimate but it is not always clear that many laymen have a sufficient grasp of world history or church history to apply any discernment.

An Overwhelmed Audience

Laymen who are attracted to this new approach to Christian doctrine are often unaware of the world behind the texts that they are reading. They are unaware of the debates over Liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. Nor are they able to articulate what the difference is between the Protestant and Roman Catholic views of canonicity. Moreover, many authors and theologians who use the conversation metaphor combine it with ideas such as deconstruction. Pastors are also in the same boat. Many have never read Derrida or thought they would have to interact with French literary theories as part of their pastoral duty to shepherd the flock. The task involved in understanding the world behind the conversation is overwhelming to those who are in front of the conversation.

A Technological Audience

The proliferation of technology also contributes to the world in front of the conversation. Indeed, one might argue that there is no world in front of the conversation because most people are already in it. That is, their ability to call anyone, anytime, and have a list of 250 of your contacts at your fingertips gives the impression that the division between the world of the text and the world of the reader is an illusion. The egalitarianism that technology provides helps to confirm to many in front of the conversation

that those who are audacious enough to think themselves worthy to preach are prideful and ignorant of their own epistemological limitations. One only has to point to the mass of information on the internet to prove that our lack of knowledge disqualifies us from any pulpit.

Summary

It is ironic that the world in front of the conversation is a world where the value of church history, theology, and philosophy has been swept under the rug. Yet it is these very topics that are needed to understand the conversation or to enter into it without appearing to be an ignoramus.

Conclusion

Conversation has become, for many, a meta-metaphor (or arch-metaphor) under which many different speech-acts take place. Conversation expresses postmodern values such as equality. It often presents an antithesis to the supposedly modern notion of an expert or preacher who claims special access to truth or a right to demand acceptance of a particular metanarrative. It rejects speech-acts that are authoritative, coercive, or privileged. Thus, conversation is a metaphor that reflects both the linguistic turn and the cultural turn of postmodernity.

Although obvious to some, trends are something that may be obvious to see but quite difficult to accurately define. They are fluid and amorphous. Such is the case with the trend in view. Not all authors or speakers discussed exhibit radical tendencies or excesses. But taken together, a larger picture of what contemporary theologians are doing with "conversation" emerges.

Positively, one can easily point to many passages of scripture that validate conversation as a Christian metaphor. Jesus calls his disciples his "friends." And friends certainly enjoy conversation with one another. In a sense, there exists an equality among Jesus and his disciples; he explains, "all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Moreover, in partial agreement with Lynch and Placher, conversation can also be employed as a valid model of engagement with the world and

Christians. In the case of doctrine, conversation must be take place so that understanding occurs before judgment or discipline is rendered.

As N.T. Wright points out, the church can validly learn from and partake of some things in the world.[50] Likewise, Richard Mouw grounds this ability to learn from and converse with the world in the doctrine of common grace. The doctrine of common grace allows us to view the world as fallen, yet also a repository of goodness that, with discernment, can be employed by Christians.[51] While it is unbiblical to dismiss "modern" metaphors such as warrior and soldier (cf. Ephesians 6), raising the importance of metaphors and the neglect of some metaphors is undoubtedly helpful.

The caveat that Mouw raises, namely, that appropriating the things of the world requires "working" and discernment, helps us to transition to the negative aspects of the conversation meta-metaphor.[52] Common grace teaches us that conversation is a one legitimate metaphor for the relationship between the church and the world. However, in the search to replace old metaphors that were over-emphasized and given undue exclusivity, the same mistake of reductionism is being made. This may take the form of a false dichotomy which states that the only model or metaphor is conversation.[53] In addition to the doctrine of common grace, the church must also maintain the doctrine of antithesis: the church is set over and against the world.[54] Craig Carter's model offers a much needed correction to those who espouse an purely conversational model to the exclusion of other models that allow for world (and other Christians) to be "preached at." Carter argues that, when the church says "me too" to the culture, the

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[50] N. T. Wright, *The Last Word: Scripture and the Authority of God – Getting Beyond the Bible Wars* (NY: HarperCollins, 2005), 58-9.

[51] Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 50.

[52] Ibid., 50.

[53] D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and It's Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 234.

[54] Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 14-16.

world cannot come to know itself as the world – separated from God's grace and redemption.[55]

The church's models and meta-metaphors must reflect what Vern Poythress calls a "symphonic theology." They must be multi-perspectival and able to reflect the diversity of speech-acts within Scripture itself.[56] The church must be willing to accept a conversational stance toward a world filled with common grace and men created in the image of God. But the church must also be willing to maintain a separation from the world so that it can be faithful to call to make disciples by preaching. There is a place for conversation and a place for preaching and teaching. To accept Scripture as the inspired word of God and to accept the demands placed upon the church from within Scripture and to accept how conversations are currently understood, is to necessarily reject the notion that everyone and every time and place is merely having an open-ended conversation.

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[55] Craig Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 199, 210.

[56] Vern Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: 2001), 96.